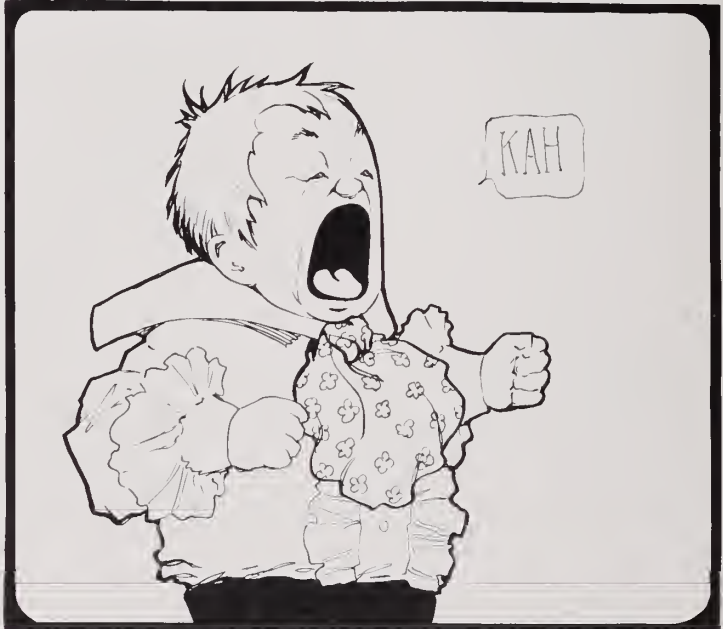# The Comic Art Show

Whitney Museum of American Art

Winsor McCay. *Little Sammy Sneeze*, 1905.

The Comic Art Show
cartoons in painting and popular culture

John Carlin and Sheena Wagstaff

Whitney Museum of American Art, Downtown Branch
At Federal Hall National Monument
26 Wall Street, New York, NY

Summer 1983

I have no intention of writing a treatise on caricature: I simply want to acquaint the reader with certain reflections which have often occurred to me on the subject of this singular genre. These reflections had become a kind of obsession for me, and I wanted to get them off my chest. Nevertheless, I have made every effort to impose some order, and thus to make their digestion more easy. This, then, is purely an artist's and a philosopher's article. No doubt a general history of caricature in its references to all the facts by which humanity has been stirred—facts political and religious, weighty or frivolous; facts relative to the disposition of the nation or to fashion—would be a glorious and important work. The task still remains to be done, for the essays which have been published up to the present are hardly more than raw materials. But I thought that this task should be divided. It is clear that a work on caricature, understood in this way, would be a history of facts, an immense gallery of anecdote. In caricature, far more than in the other branches of art, there are two sorts of works which are to be prized and commended for different and almost contrary reasons. One kind have value only by reason of the *fact* which they represent. No doubt they have a right to the attention of the historian, the archaeologist, and even the philosopher; they deserve to take their place in the national archives, in the biographical registers of human thought. Like the flysheets of journalism, they are swept out of sight by the same tireless breeze which supplies us with fresh ones. But the others—and it is with these that I want to concern myself with especially—contain a mysterious, lasting, eternal element, which recommends them to the attention of artists. What a curious thing, and one truly worthy of attention, is the introduction of this indefinable element of beauty, even in works which are intended to represent his proper ugliness—both moral and physical—to man! And what is no less mysterious is that this lamentable spectacle excites in him an undying and incorrigible mirth.

—Baudelaire, "On the Essence of Laughter, and, in General, on the Comic in the Plastic Arts" (1855; trans. Jonathan Mayne, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, London: Phaidon, 1964)

Andy Warhol. *Myths*, "Superman," 1981. Silkscreen, 38 x 38". Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., New York.

Contents

Cliff Sterrett. *Polly and Her Pals*. Ink, crayon, and wash on paper, Sunday.

George Herriman. *Krazy Kat*, 1918. Pen and ink, daily.

Foreword

by Tom Armstrong, Director

The Whitney Museum of American Art is committed to bringing the highest quality work by American artists to the widest possible audience. This focus of our activities is consistently revealed through a complex variety of programs, including various explorations of contemporary cultural concerns. One aspect of the evolution of American art which has been insufficiently reviewed by museums is the importance that popular art sources have had in the work of some our most eminent artists. John Carlin and Sheena Wagstaff, two Helena Rubinstein Fellows in the Museum's Independent Study Program, have redressed this oversight in "The Comic Art Show" at the Downtown Branch of the Whitney Museum.

The exhibition traces the development and subsequent appropriation of those most indigenous of American cultural forms, the comic strip and cartoon character. Extensive research has uncovered some unique and rarely seen works of art which are exhibited complementary original comic strips, most of which have personal significance for many Americans. The initial quotation of comic characters by the Pop artists was noteworthy as much for its low art origins as for its importance in defining a wholly American art, independent of European influence. We are very pleased that this publication will accompany the exhibition and be distributed to a wide audience.

In its ten years of existence the Downtown Branch has become an important feature in the daily life of the people who live and work in lower Manhattan. We extend our gratitude to the business community of that area for its continued support of our efforts.
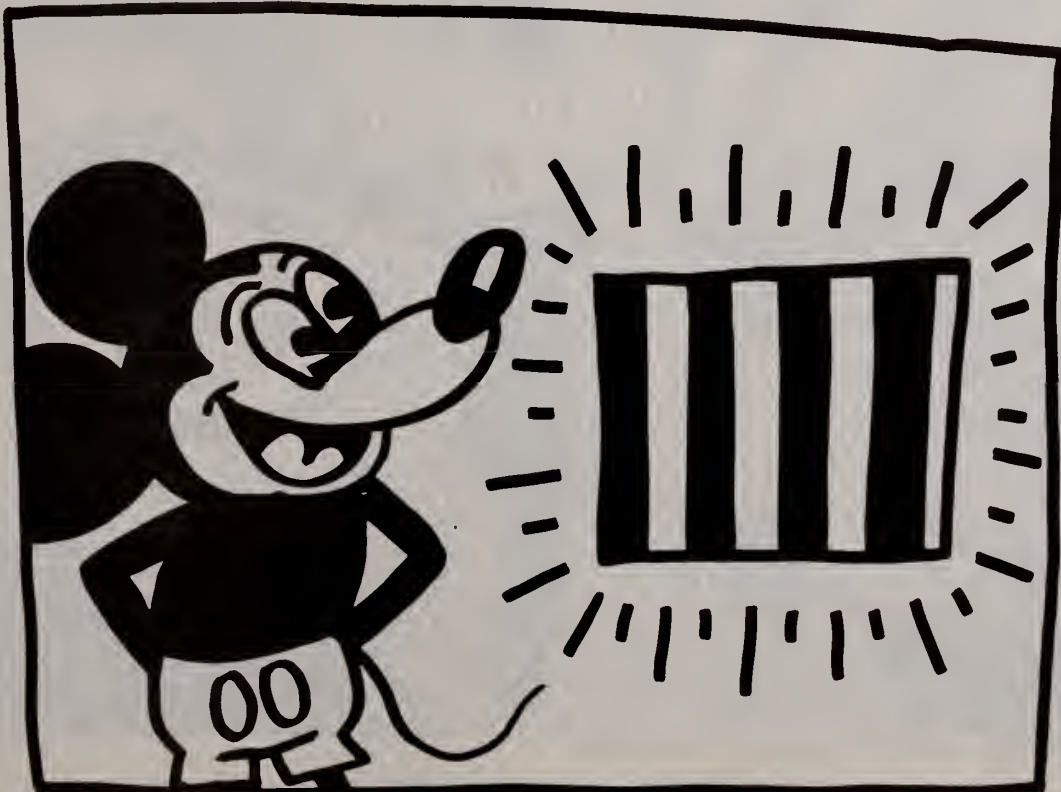
Keith Haring. *Untitled*, July 1981. Magic marker on paper, 20 x 26". Collection of the artist.

Roy Lichtenstein. *Image Duplicator*, 1963. Magna on canvas, 20 x 24″. Collection of David Lichtenstein.

Introduction

by John Carlin and Sheena Wagstaff

"The Comic Art Show" is an exhibition of American comic strips and paintings from the twentieth century which examines the graphic style of the comics in popular culture and contemporary fine art. The show is not meant to be a comprehensive history or to provide an exhaustive definition of the comics. The focus is on the visual style of the comics in terms of their formal development and the influence of their structure and characters on contemporary paintings.

One sign of the visual and mythographic success of the comics is their quotation in works of contemporary art. Beginning in the mid-fifties with the work of Jess, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg, comics became an important source of imagery in fine art. The trend reached its height in the Pop Art movement. The careers of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and Claes Oldenburg all were launched through the use of comic imagery. Comic quotation continued to be used throughout the seventies, notably in the work of John Wesley, Jim Nutt, Alexis Smith, and Vernon Fisher. Recently there has been a striking resurgence of comic imagery among graffiti-oriented artists such as Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf, and Lee Quinones and more formally oriented artists like David Salle.

In addition to documenting this trend, one must ask why this type of imagery is suitable to painting and why it is quoted with such frequency. Each artist uses the comics in his own fashion, ranging from purely formal appreciation to a nostalgic nod to a favorite cartoon character. The aesthetic quality of the comics makes their quotation a type of art about art rather than simply cultural appropriation.

Along with the Hollywood film, blues, and jazz, comics became one of the preeminent forms of mass communication in twentieth-century America. And, as film and jazz have produced a medium for artistic geniuses like D. W. Griffith, Buster Keaton, Duke Ellington, and Robert Johnson, so the comics have been a vehicle for the remarkable talents of such artists as Winsor McCay and George Herriman.

The salient feature of the comic strip, from the sublime (Sterrett's *Polly and Her Pals*) to the ridiculous (Bushmiller's *Nancy*), is its integral use of image and text within a narrative sequence, employing a continuing cast of characters. This simple form has given rise to a multitude of images and sentiments which have come to play an undeniable role in the imagination of our age. Our concentration within the expansive field of the comics is primarily on those which satisfy aesthetic rather than social criteria. The work of the major comic-strip artists throughout the twentieth century is presented in this exhibition not only as source material for the sanctified representations of fine art but as a vital and uncompromised art form in itself.
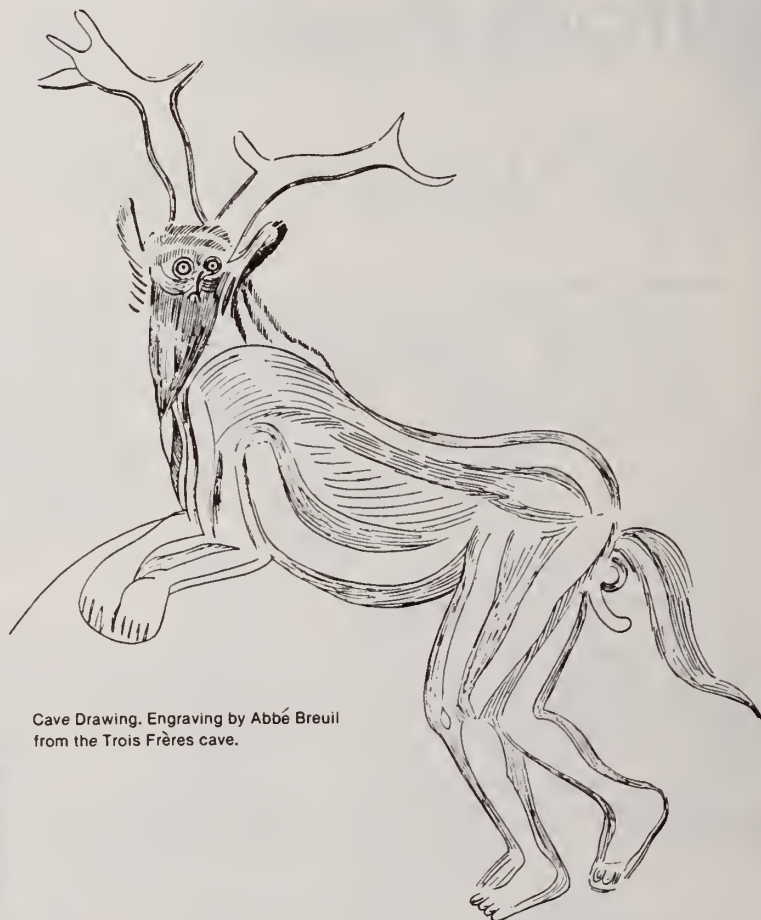
Chester Gould. From *Dick Tracy*, 1942.

THIS IS NO AMBULANCE, THIS IS AN ORDINARY GROCER'S DELIVERY WAGON!

LET'S GO, BOYS!
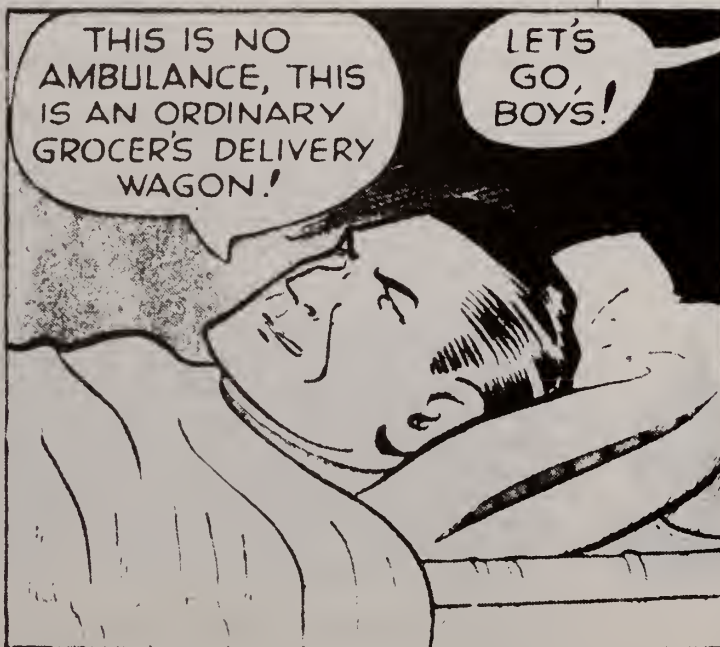
In Praise of Folly: The Early Development of Comics In Art

HA! WELL I DONT CARE I'M IN GOOD COMPANY!

© Ray Moniz

Winsor McCay. Panel from *Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend.*

Cave Drawing. Engraving by Abbé Breuil
from the Trois Frères cave.

by John Carlin

The early development of comics is typically
traced from Egyptian hieroglyphics through the
illuminated manuscripts of medieval Europe up to
the cheap illustrations which proliferated in the
post-Renaissance era as a result of the invention
of movable type. This formal development is
paralleled by the equally important, if less appar-
ent, development of a point of view. The comics are
distinguished as much by the spirit which
animates their form as by the form itself.

The soul never thinks without an image.
—Aristotle

The earliest existing works of representation are
the well-known depictions of animals found in
cave paintings. It is noteworthy that the technique
was that of the cartoon. The employment of this
most basic representational form entails certain
conceptual choices, in particular, the use of meto-
nymy (the evocation of a whole object through a
partial rendition) to indicate reality through a
single abstracted image. Because we are so
accustomed to representation, it is difficult to con-
ceive of the original leap of the imagination that
allowed images to stand for things and enabled
the observer to respond to those images with his
whole being. The cartoon continues to derive its
effectiveness from this basic cathartic response.

The development of a grammatical relationship
between images is recorded in Egyptian hiero-
glyphics, which used the cartoon both as a means
of documentation and as a form of decoration. The
relationship between the Egyptian pictogram and
the comic strip is cleverly represented in Jess's
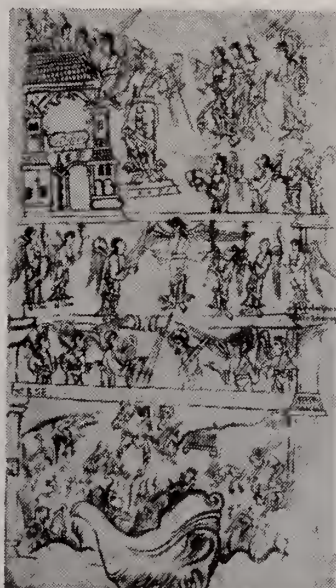*The Truth Shall Be Thy Warrant* (1976) in which an

Jess. *The Truth Shall Be Thy Warrant*, 1976. Oil on canvas, 46¾ x 58¾". Odyssia Gallery, New York.

Colored Drawing on papyrus, XIX Dynasty. Egyptian Museum, Cairo.
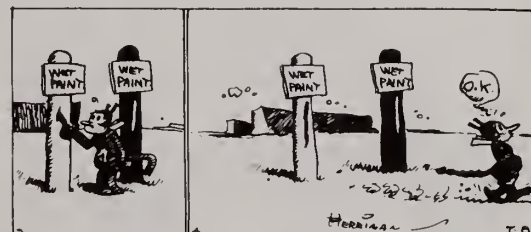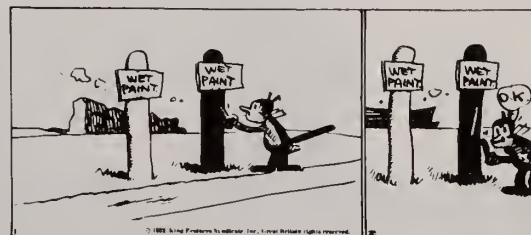

Funeral banquet. Wall painting from the tomb of Vizir Rekhmire, Thebes, XVIII Dynasty.

Fall of the Rebel Angels from the Caedmon Manuscript, c. 1000 A.D. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

George Herriman. *Krazy Kat*, 1932.

© King Features Syndicate

Egyptian wall painting serves as the background for a daily Krazy Kat sequence. The profundity of Jess's juxtaposition becomes apparent when his work is compared with the papyrus drawing from the XVIth Dynasty, where the satiric image of a situation involving an anthropomorphized cat and mouse clearly anticipates Krazy Kat, Tom and Jerry, and other such images in twentieth-century culture.

In addition to projecting similar images of the human spirit upon the natural world, hieroglyphics and comics share certain structural characteristics. This sense of layout, in which images are read sequentially like words, was carried over into the graphic designs which illuminate medieval manuscripts. In the manuscripts, however, image and text are separated, with the scroll serving the same function as the balloon in comic strips. It has been noted that the most obvious precursor of comic illustration was the stained-glass window, which presented the teachings of the Bible in simple narrative sequences that could be understood by those unable to read.

These early representational devices were rendered obsolete by the visual sophistication of the Renaissance, which formalized the dichotomy between fine art and illustration. The most interesting developments in this period were Leonardo da Vinci's integration of image and text in his notebooks and the linking of words and pictures in didactic sequences in the emblem books of artists like Francis Quarles (c. 1635). Still, it was not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the distinction between art and illustration again became blurred. The exemplary figures in the return to illustration as a medium for mass art were Goya, and, above all, Hogarth, whose inexpensive prints were the first modern works to express the narrative sequence through images. *The Harlot's Progress* (1732) and *The Rake's Progress* (1733–34) were simultaneously developed as paintings and prints; through mass reproduction, the latter became immensely popular. These works differed from traditional history painting not only in the use
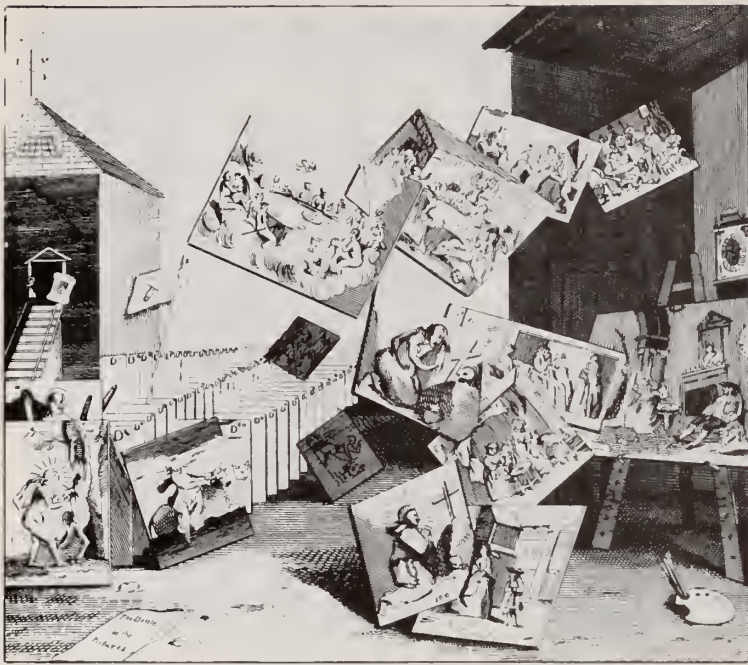
William Hogarth. *The Battle of the Pictures*, 1806-1808, Engraving.

Grandville. Frontispiece for *Les Metamorphoses du Jour*, c. 1853.

Honore Daumier. *Pygmalion: Oh Triumph of Art*, 1842. Lithograph.

Francisco Goya. *Dream of Reason, Caprices*, 1793-96. Etching.

Stephane Mallarmé. Drawing from a letter to Méry Laurent.

Rodolphe Töpffer. *M. Jabon*, c. 1840.

Thomas Rowlandson. *Antiquarians*, c. 1800. Engraving.

Odilon Redon. *Cyclops* from *Les Origines*, 1883. Lithograph.

of multiple pictures but in the satiric depiction of everyday life. Instead of using elevated themes from history, Hogarth wished to elevate the world around him. Hogarth's contemporary Thomas Rowlandson is credited with drawing the first continuing comic character, Dr. Syntax. This work, along with James Gillray's cartoons, paved the way for the invention of the modern comic-strip form by Swiss educator Rodolphe Töpffer, whose illustrated stories from the mid-1840s were the first to use a panel sequence which linked pictures and text. Töpffer's formal invention, followed twenty years later by the German illustrator Wilhelm Busch's development of the demonic characters Max and Moritz, set the stage for the twentieth-century comic strip.

However important the links between comic strips and the history of pictograms, one must also recognize the differences between the two forms. The comics, in addition to using the image as a sign which is meant to be read, project a certain atmosphere which led to their being called "comic" in the first place. Of course the term "comic" is ambiguous; many strips are not based on humorous situations, and the finest are memorable for their execution, characters, and dramatic pacing rather than for their gags. The continuing popularity and artistic value of the comics cannot be explained simply by the fact that they are funny. They work because an element of fantasy is perfectly rendered through the medium. Although fantasy is all too often merely adolescent wish-fulfillment (as in superhero adventure stories), there is also a more interesting type which deals with the absurd, grotesque, and surreal. Much of what gives the comics immediate appeal is that this more profound form of fantasy allows society to exorcise hidden impulses in a seemingly innocent fashion. In this respect comics work like dreams, whose distortion and displacement of everyday life help make social integration possible.

The dreamlike surreal quality of the comics comes out of a tradition that stretches from Poe to Baudelaire, Jarry, and Duchamp. Poe, in addition
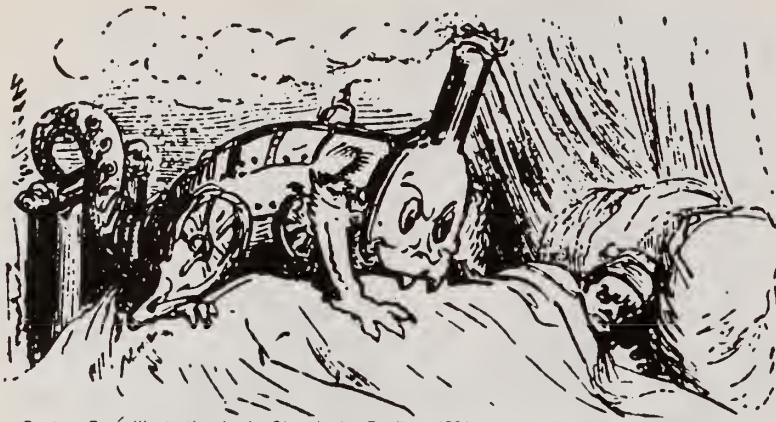
Gustave Doré. Illustration for *Le Chemin des Ecoliers*, 1861.

EVERYBODY'S GOT TROUBLES, ACE

CHUG
CHUG
CHUG

© 1983 R. Crumb

R. Crumb. Sketchbook drawing.

Zo. One of a series of illustrations for Raymond Roussel's *Nouvelles Impressions d'Afrique*, 1928.

Alfred Jarry. Illustrations for the *Almanach du Père Ubu*, 1901.

Alfred Jarry. Cover drawing for *Ubu Roi* program, 1898.

to inspiring the Symbolists, helped create many of the genres upon which popular culture depends: horror, suspense, science-fiction, and the detective story. Poe's contribution was his development of the apocalyptic function in popular literature as an acceptable forum for the subversive energy of personal and cultural decadence. Whereas most popular fiction depends upon the transparency of the author's style, Poe's macabre and obsessional tales were written in classical prose so perfect that the style became as important as the stories themselves. Through bringing style to the foreground, Poe initiated a distinct form of modernism in which fiction refers to itself rather than to something outside in the world of of objective reality.

Poe's French translator, Baudelaire, was the first art critic to give comics serious attention. His article "On the Essence of Laughter, and in General, on the Comic in the Plastic Arts" (1855) stresses the importance of caricature not only in presenting the ephemeral character of everyday life but in capturing its spirit and making it mean-

ingful within the history of art. The illustrations of Baudelaire's contemporaries Daumier, Doré, and Grandville (and later Redon) anticipated the graphic sophistication of the comics. Daumier developed caricature that was not dependent upon anatomy; Doré, a dramatic point of view and striking visual virtuosity; and Grandville, the use of anthropomorphized animal figures to satirize a bourgeois life-style. The poet Mallarmé used the comic-strip form in a letter to his mistress Méry Laurent, depicting her as a peacock. Lewis Carroll illustrated the original manuscript of *Alice in Wonderland* with his own marvelous sketches; these were later professionally redone by Sir John Tenniel. The most influential use of comic illustration was by Alfred Jarry, author of the dramatic farce *Ubu Roi* (1896). Jarry's theory of the absurd anticipated the elevation of adolescent humor into fine art and its veneration in popular culture in the twentieth century. Jarry drew many pictures of Ubu, depicting this grotesque anarchic figure in illustrations which employ narrative development,

John Quidor. *Anthony Van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvesant*, 1839. Oil on canvas. Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.

balloons, and panel sequences. Ubu and Dr. Faust-roll, Jarry's other 'pataphysical character, are modern versions of the Fool, part of a tradition that stretches from Falstaff, Don Quixote, Gargantua, and Orlando Furioso to Happy Hooligan, Count Screwloose, Mr. Natural, and Zippy the Pinhead. The Fool operates, in terms of plot, the way puns do verbally. Both are beyond morality, subverting authority and demonstrating through transparent irony that meaning is arbitrary.

A similar trend toward caricature and comic exaggeration can be seen in American art. The complex yet familiar humor of the comics owes much to a distinctly American form of humor that extends from oral folk tales into the nineteenth-century novel, genre painting, silent films, cartoons, and comic strips. Three outstanding visual examples from the nineteenth century are: John Quidor's *Antony Van Corlear Brought into the Presence of Peter Stuyvesant*, an erotic parable in

paint about art and authority; Christopher Cranch's *The Transparent Eyeball*, an outrageous parody of Emerson's famous metaphor; and David Gilmour Blythe's *Lincoln Crushing the Dragon of Rebellion*, a caustic satire in paint which antici-pates the work of the great political cartoonist Thomas Nast.

The spirit of the comics pervades both fine art and the mass media, fusing the high and the low through absurdity and formal self-awareness. Not only did many painters begin their careers as car-toonists—from Delacroix to Duchamp, Feininger, and George Luks (who drew a version of R. F. Out-cault's *The Yellow Kid*)—the cartoon itself has developed many of the important formal and spiri-tual traits of traditional art into a popular medium perfectly suited to the twentieth century. In an ideal museum of modern art, the Bride and her Bachelors would hang alongside Krazy, Ignatz, and Offisa Pup.

15

THE COMIC STRIP

The Golden Age:
Origins and Early Masters

A typical daily page from 1915.

by Richard Marschall

Charles Saalburgh. Panels from *The Ting-a-lings*, 6/22/1854.

Rudolph Dirks. Panel from *The Katzenjammer Kids*, 6/14/05.

THE YELLOW KID TAKES A HAND AT GOLF.

A rare sequential narrative from Richard Outcault's *Yellow Kid*.

Frederick Burr Opper. Panel from *Puck*, c. 1890.

The comic strip, which seems to us an inevitable amalgam of related forms, did, of course, evolve in stages. What is remarkable about its development is that the basic form was established so quickly. Its elements—sequential panels which tell an unfolding story; balloons that carry the dialogue; the juxtaposition of time-space relationships; the unique melding of narrative and pictorial elements; the utilization of identifiable characters—were established within a decade of its inception, and remain essentially unchanged today.

In the America of the 1890s the combination of prosperity, higher literacy, and technological advances led to a proliferation of humor magazines. The most prominent of these pioneer publications were *Puck*, *Judge*, and *Life*, and cartoons were prominently featured in their pages. The photo-engraving process (particularly the color lithography on covers and center-spreads) enabled the cartoonist to make full use of his talents.

When *Puck* was launched in the 1870s, brutal political broadsides were the vogue in cartoons; by the end of the following decade, this form had been replaced by the more polite "social" cartoon, which had a lengthy caption. By the nineties, cartoonists were increasingly using "series" to convey their ideas. The theme was conveyed in several panels—a little story progressing to a dénouement. Most of these "series" had no words at all or used typeset dialogue and captions. Curiously, not a single cartoonist placed dialogue within the panel frame or experimented with characters that were carried from issue to issue.

The first continuing newspaper cartoon feature, *California Bears*, was created in 1892 by James Swinnerton for Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner*. *The Ting-a-Ling Kids*, the first American cartoon series to appear in color, made its debut in the *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, just in time for the celebration of the Columbian Exposition. The series, drawn by the artist Charles Saalburgh, had a cast of readily identifiable characters who reappeared in successive issues. In 1894 the cartoonist R. F. Outcault began producing a cartoon series about a
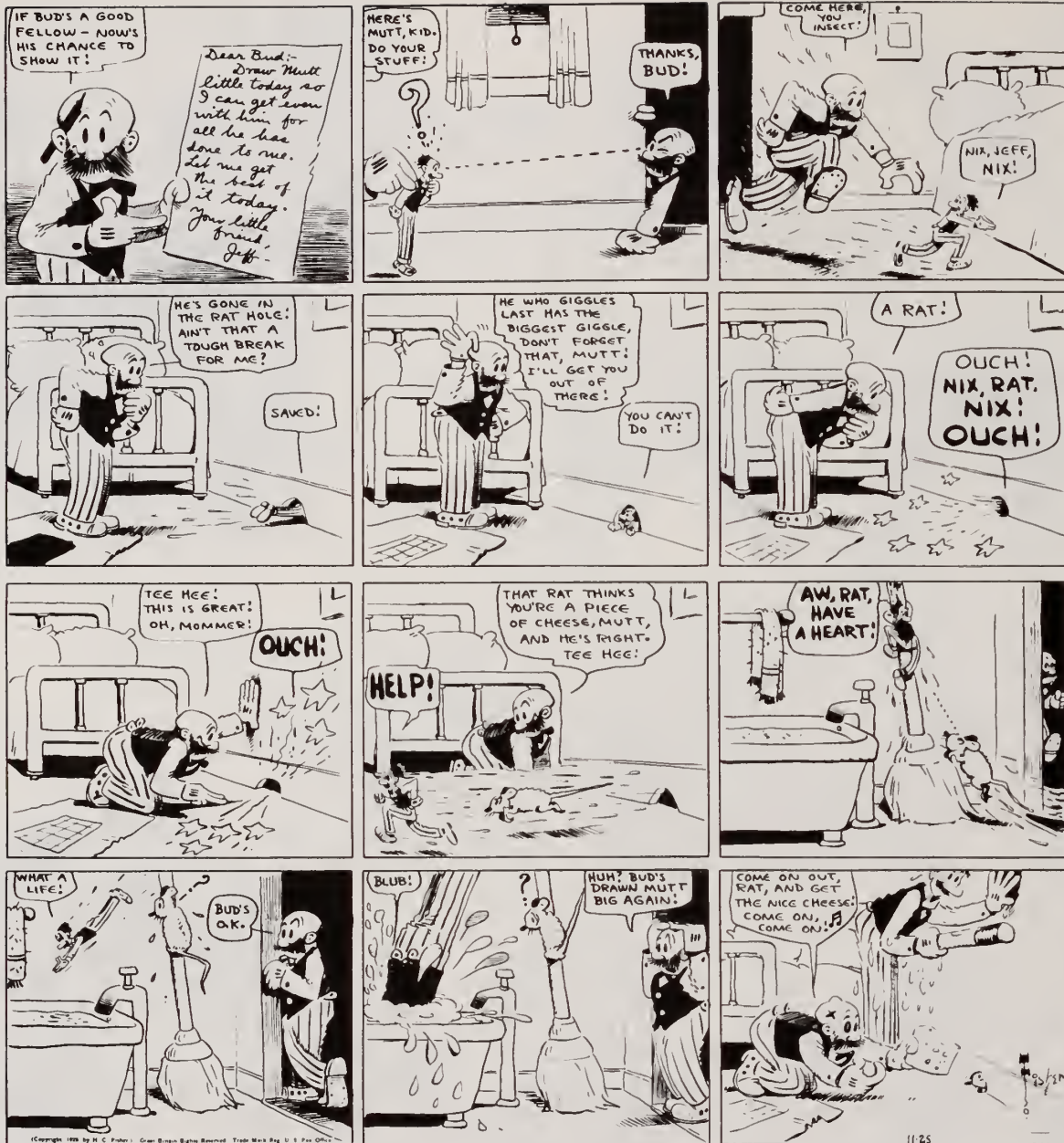
Budd Fisher. *Mutt and Jeff*, 11/25/28.

slum urchin for Pulitzer's *New York World*. The urchin, who later became known as the "Yellow Kid," was an enormous popular success and Outcault was soon hired away by Hearst's *Journal*. The ensuing war between Hearst and Pulitzer over the Yellow Kid gave rise to the phrase "Yellow Journalism." Outcault introduced characters with names, some textual interpolations within the visual frame (usually in the form of labels), and, on rare occasions, the use of sequences rather than one large panel. Other cartoonists began to employ the sequential format with greater frequency, however, and soon multipaneled strips were being featured by every major newspaper in America.

The first age of the comic strip can be illuminated by examining the work of several geniuses who defined the new art form. The cartoonists Frederic Burr Opper and Rudolph Dirks began working for the *Journal* in the late 1890s. Opper, the Mark Twain of cartooning, had been drawing for *Puck* for a quarter of a century and had illustrated several books by major writers. By the time

Hearst hired him, Opper was a respected public figure. His stature, as much as his talent, made him an important addition to the Hearst comic sections, which had been widely condemned as vulgar and worthless. Opper had done very few panel series for *Puck*, concentrating instead on single-panel cartoons and political drawings, but in the *Journal*'s Sunday funnies he used sequential panels and, from the beginning, balloons to carry dialogue. His *Happy Hooligan* first appeared in the *Journal* in 1900.

Rudolph Dirks, a German immigrant, was barely twenty years old and a virtual amateur when he was assigned the task of drawing a version of Wilhelm Busch's German classic *Max und Moritz*. *The Katzenjammer Kids*, which dealt with the antics of Hans and Fritz, was the result.

Bud Fisher's *Mutt and Jeff* and George McManus's *The Newlyweds* were the first popular daily strips. (The form had been pioneered by Clare Briggs and George Herriman.) While McManus went on to create *Bringing up Father*, Fisher further developed *Mutt and Jeff*, whose cultural

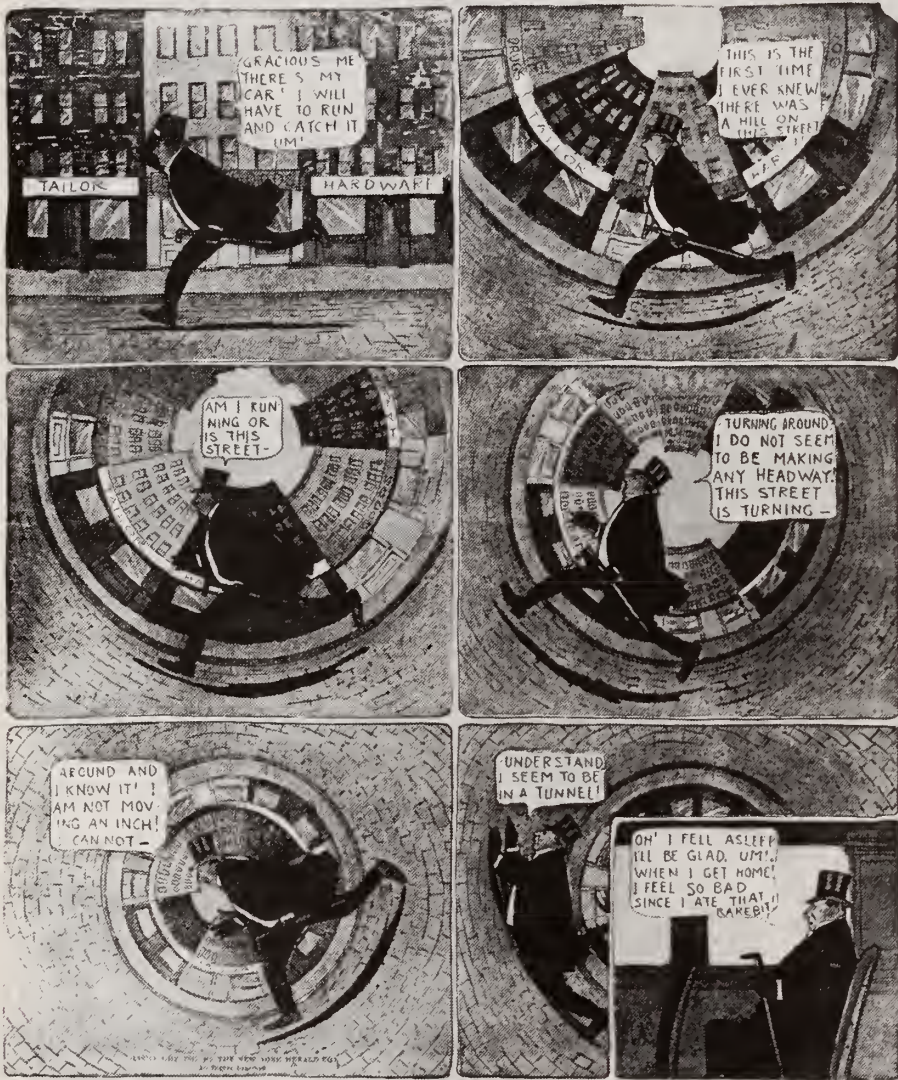18

George McManus. *Bringing Up Father*, 3/10/49.
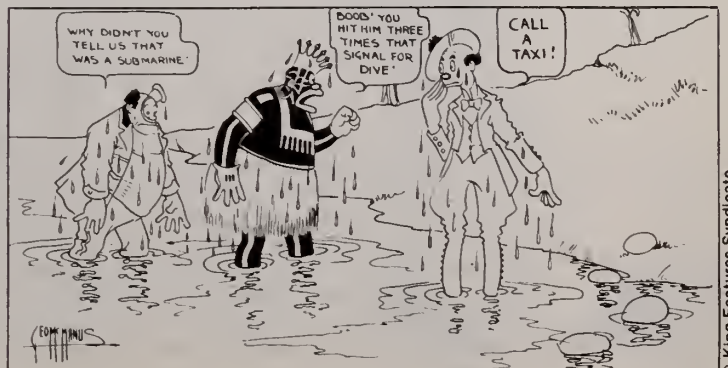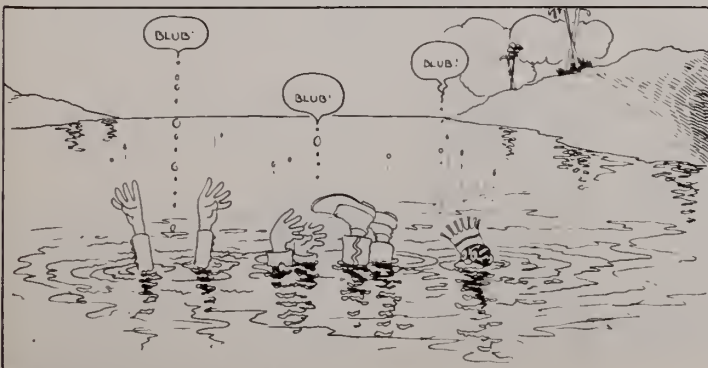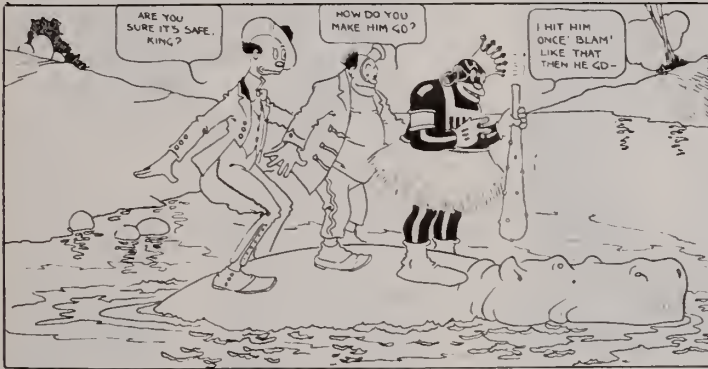
George McManus. *Spareribs and Gravy*, 1909.

Winsor McCay. *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend*, 2/9/13.

Winsor McCay. Panel from *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 10/25/08.

impact was so pervasive that it inspired James Joyce to use the characters as versions of Shem and Shaun in *Finnegans Wake*.

The early newspaper comic artists worked under nearly ideal conditions: there were few restrictions of a technical or thematic nature; they were free to use a whole page or whatever space they deemed appropriate; they often collaborated with each other on features; experimentation and innovation were warmly encouraged by their bosses, who were anxious to sell more newspapers; and the quality of the reproduction and color work was excellent.

One artist who took full advantage of these ideal conditions was Winsor McCay. His *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, which made its debut in 1905, was a masterpiece of fantasy. Every week the title character, a young boy, would enter a dream world peopled by aristocrats, villains, and weird animals. In the last panel of every Sunday strip Nemo would inevitably awake into a real world which was infinitely prosaic in comparison with the world of his dreams.

McCay's sense of whimsy manifested itself in characters like the dwarf Flip, a sarcastic, egomaniacal precursor of W. C. Fields; the Princess; King Morpheus; Doctor Pill; the Candy Kid; the Jungle Imp; and Nemo himself. Even more impressive than McCay's flights of fancy were his graphic gifts. He was a master of the pen: his composition was flawless; he had an unerring sense of anatomy; he was probably the most patient crosshatch artist in cartooning; his fascination with architecture revealed itself in meticulously detailed drawings of incredible beauty; his color work was bold and lavish; and he employed surrealistic distortion and exaggeration in masterful ways.

McCay's design work on *Nemo* can be divided into two distinct categories, the first of which is the subtle transformation of forms in a narrative sequence. In one exceptional strip the moon in the title frame becomes a circular plaza in the final panel. The second is the utilization of the entire page as a coherent design element in which vertical and horizontal shapes harmonize to create an

Winsor McCay. *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 2/16/06.
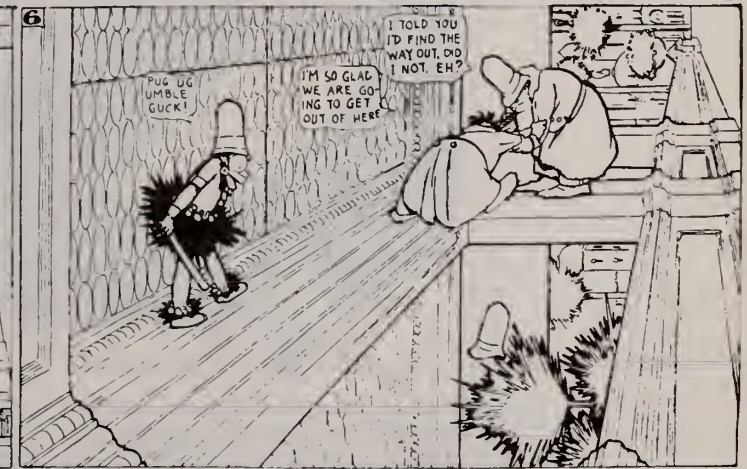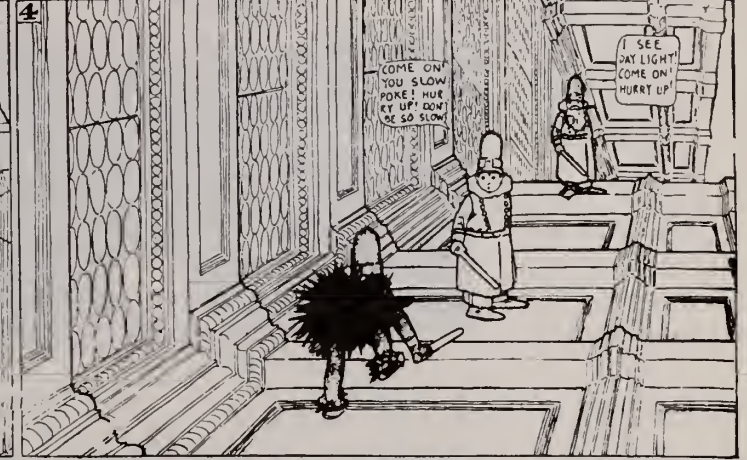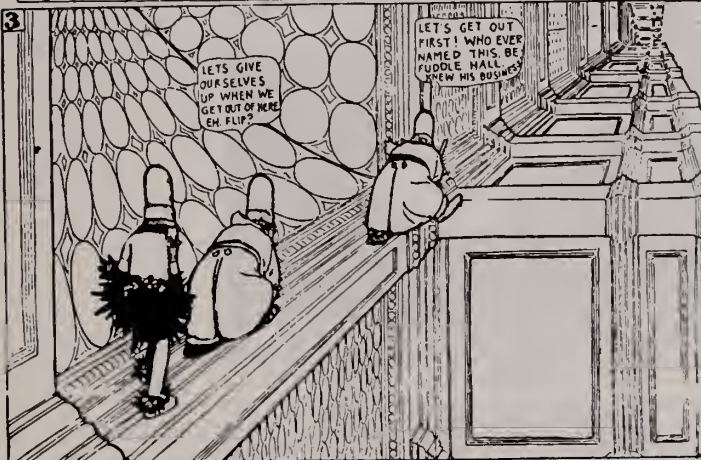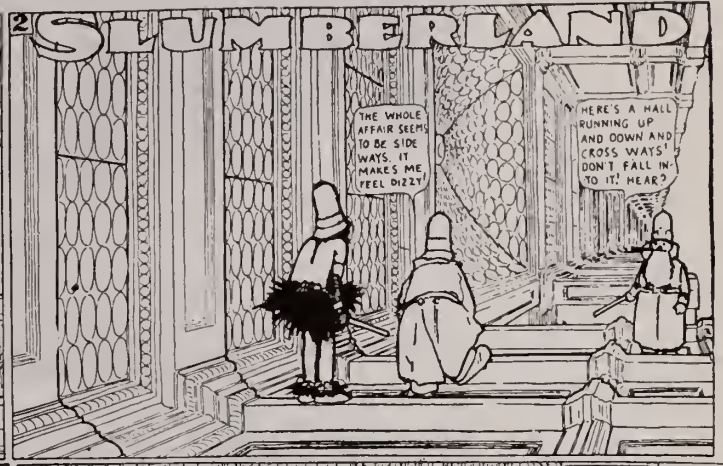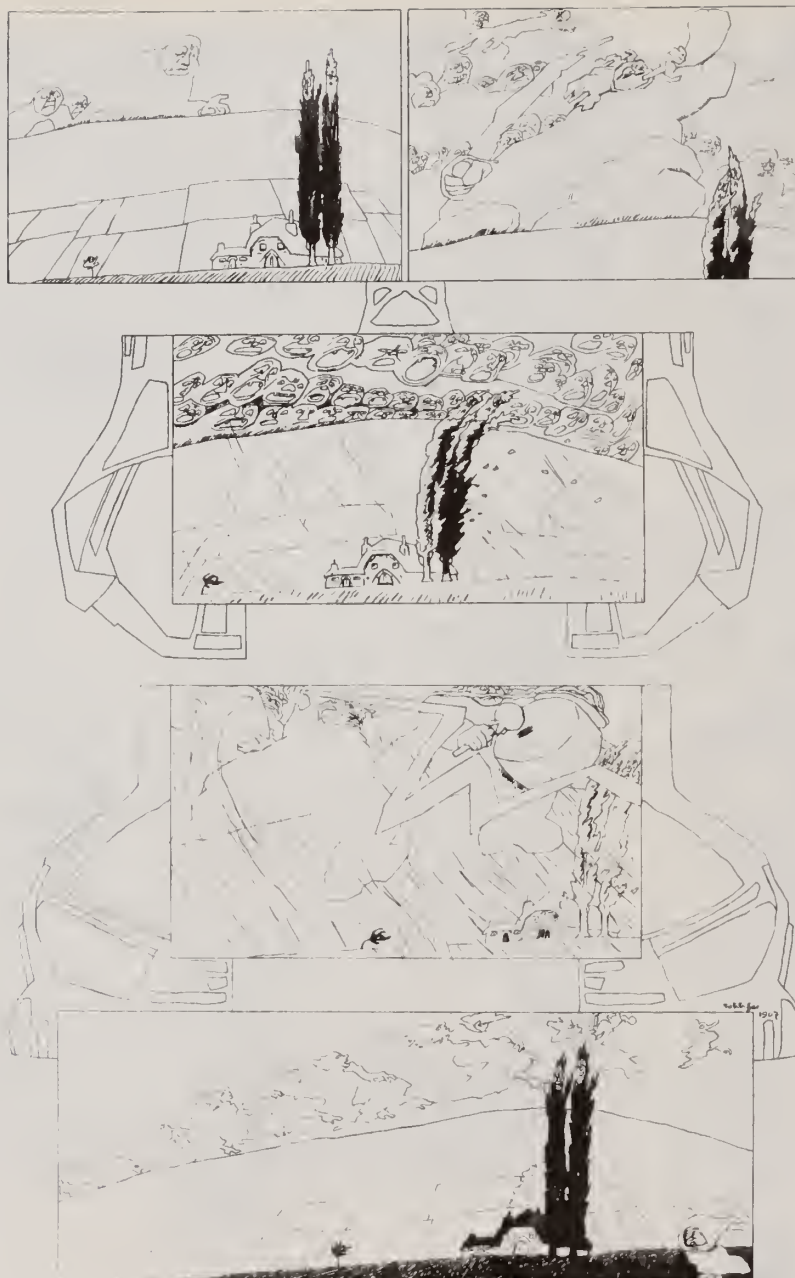
Lyonel Feininger. *Wee Willie Winkie's World*, 1907.   © Tribune Company Syndicate

overall effect. The most notable example is found in a strip which is entirely covered by the noodle-like arabesque of the legs of Nemo's bed walking through his dream.

In addition to *Nemo*, McCay drew an earlier strip, *Dream of the Rarebit Fiend*, which was equally inventive and at times even more bizarre. In both strips McCay used his unmatched technical virtuosity and formal self-awareness not only to create a fantasy dream world but to challenge the conventions of reality in representation. A simple example is *Little Sammy Sneeze*, which depicts Sammy sneezing and breaking the frame in which he is contained. Not content to merely tell a story, McCay constructed layers of representation which lock together with the same harmony and formal rigor that characterize his baroque visual designs. In short, McCay utilized the nascent comic art form in ways consistent with its evolving formal structure, but to achieve bold, limit-stretching ends.

At about the same time, another strip artist was taking some ordinary characters on adventures in a real world depicted in a frankly surreal fashion. In 1906 Lyonel Feininger created *The Kin-der Kids* and *Wee Willie Winkie's World*, two strips which come close as any have to combining comics with fine art. *The Kin-der Kids* involved a madcap chase around the world in which an assortment of children eludes a bizarre group of menacing characters (some of them relatives). Wee Willie Winkie was a mute observer of the forces of nature which were endowed with human characteristics—thunderclouds in the form of a marching army, windows yawning at dusk, weeping trees.

Feininger's output was audacious in terms of both conception and execution. He regarded the entire comics page as a design challenge. His work featured embellished borders, severe symmetry, color schemes developed in terms of the entire strip, and a drawing style that clearly foreshadowed later achievements in European modernism.

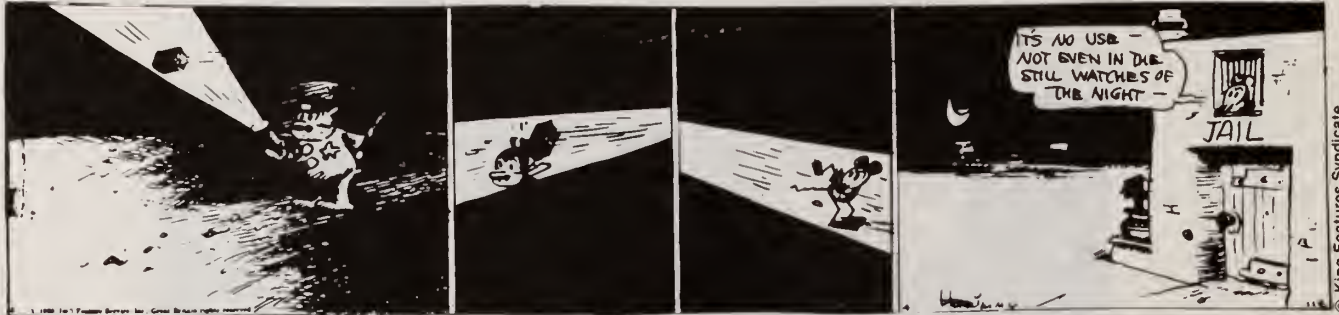*Krazy Kat* is the one comic strip that has been celebrated as art since its inception. It began in

George Herriman. *Krazy Kat*, 2/6/38.

Frank King. *Gasoline Alley*, 1925.

George Herriman. *Gooseberry Sprigg,* 12/1/10.

George Herriman. *Krazy Kat,* 11/6/30.

The Family Upstairs—Ignatz Mouse and Krazy Kat Are Sent Below ✿ ✿ By Herriman

George Herriman. *The Family Upstairs,* 6/24/11.

1910 as a slight addition to one of Herriman's existing strips, *The Family Upstairs* (originally titled *The Dingbat Family*). By 1911, *Krazy Kat* was an independent strip which ran uninterrupted for the next thirty-three years as a daily feature. After 1916 it also appeared on Sundays. It was predicated on the simplest plot: Krazy, a cat of indeterminate gender, loves Ignatz Mouse, who, in turn, loves hurling bricks at the Kat's head, a gesture Krazy interprets as a sign of affection. Krazy is protected by Offisa Pup, who polices Ignatz, ritually placing him in the Coconino County Jail. This basic plot, repeated virtually every day from 1910 to 1944, has never lost its vitality and appeal. Its simplicity allowed Herriman stylistic liberties which he boldly exploited. *Krazy Kat* is outstanding for its backgrounds, verbal wit, and intellectual complexity.

The surreal ballet between cat and mouse occurs in the strangest locales: visionary desert scenes of the American Southwest that shift from frame to frame without apparent order. Herriman's control was so complete that his strips maintain coherence while abandoning the expected continuities of time, place, and causality. For instance, one extraordinary Sunday page not only plays upon the structure of the panel strip but also is a meditation on the nature of representation within the context of Herriman's convoluted kingdom of fantasy and repetitive obsession. Ignatz, like many artists, creates a picture of what society (represented here by Offisa Pup) represses—his endless need to bean Kat with a brick. Pup, thinking to outdo the clever mouse, tries to close the fiction by painting Ignatz into jail (the dog's personal obsession). Meanwhile, Ignatz, having successfully laid his artistic dog-trap, is free to complete his side of the eternal triangle. At the bottom of the strip an elongated panel obliquely comments on the action. A woodpecker, a small tear escaping from his beak, stares at a painting of a tree. The intentional confusion between salivation and emotion is borne out by the onlooking characters. Krazy exclaims, "But he's a ott krittik ain't he?"; to which Pup responds, "Yes, but he's
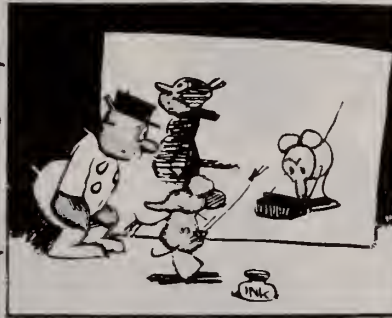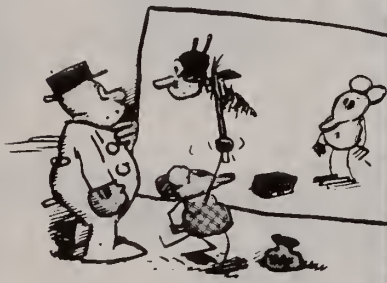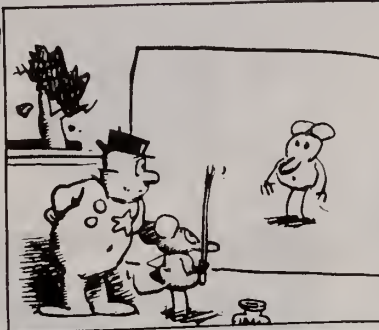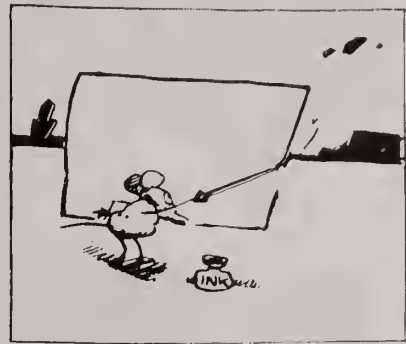
George Herriman. *Krazy Kat*, 6/11/39.

Cliff Sterrett. *Polly and Her Pals*, 2/17/29.

also a woodpecker." Ignatz simply utters a knowing "Ah-h."

Unlike Feininger, for whom comic strips were just a stage in the transition from political cartoons and social satire to fine art, Herriman was incredibly prolific. In his early syndicate days he developed features only to abandon them to other artists so that he could create new ones. (His original creations lived for years in other hands.) *Krazy Kat* dominated the end of Herriman's career. His other comic strips, most of which have been forgotten, include *Alexander the Cat*, *Stumble Inn*, *Professor Otto and His Auto*, *Major Ozone's Fresh Air Crusade*, *Baron Mooch*, *Baron Bean*, *Gooseberry Sprigg* (sometimes *"Sprig"*), and *Mr. Proones the Plunger*.

Cliff Sterrett's vision was similar to that of Herriman: playful distortions of reality, an absurdist approach to human nature; but where Herriman situated his characters in an other-worldly environment, Sterrett's *Polly and Her Pals* (begun in 1912) had a domestic setting. Initially, Polly's stories involved romantic and madcap exploits which kept her parents on edge. Then Paw and the ever-mute Kitty replaced Polly as the central characters. The simplicity of the story line belies Sterrett's formal wizardry. He not only transforms the features of homely interiors into stylized environments, he creates distorted angles, images of impossible weightlessness, and bright strident colors which complement the zany temperaments of the characters. The resultant rhythm gives *Polly* an abstract harmony which perfectly syncopates the elements of the static comic strip into a masterly rendering of movement and music. (Sterrett's abstract strips bring him close to Kandinsky's Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*.)

Formal expectations are literally turned on their heads with a 1929 strip in which Sterrett's graphic eloquence removes the necessity for words. The story of Paw on skates mistaking someone for his wife, and the consequences of his ensuing affectionate shove, is told mainly through the characters' reflections in the ice. Sterrett's visionary
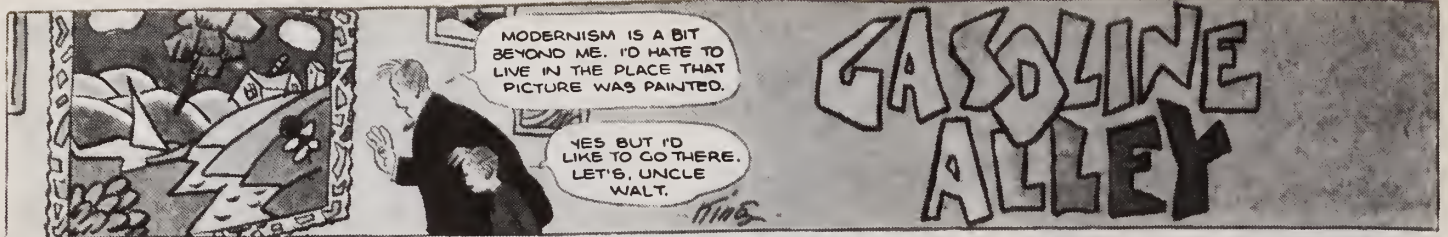
Frank King. *Gasoline Alley*, 1931.

poetry forces the reader into an active relationship with the art, either through realigning the process of seeing, or, if the page is turned upside down, by reversing the progress of reading—from bottom to top and from right to left. The former is encouraged because the dramatic moments in the plot are portrayed directly, not through reflection. The movement of Paw across the ice is marked by tree trunks (there are no "action-lines") which serve as visual aids that enable the reader to distinguish reality from reflection and also as formal dividing elements within each frame, creating a unified graphic rhythm throughout the strip.

Frank King is a unique figure in the history of the comics. Of the above-mentioned group, perhaps only Opper and Herriman were more prolific. *Gasoline Alley* (which first appeared in 1919) is, of course, what King is best remembered for. It evolved from a strip devoted to the automobile craze into a chronicle of everyday life. *Gasoline Alley* is a sympathetic portrayal of the soul of a people, as unprepossessing and decent as the

midwestern heartland from which its creator came.

The mundane events that King turned to poetry in his daily strip stories were complemented by Sunday pages of fantasy and visual exuberance. Here we see an entirely different, more playful King. One of his favorite tricks was to treat the entire page as a single scene, breaking it up into the traditional panel structure and having one character walk through the panels. These pages were treated from an aerial perspective similar to that used in many Japanese woodcuts. Occasionally King would use planes which extended from the top of the page to the bottom, with a different prop forming the axis in each panel. King was perhaps the last great comic-strip artist to exploit the full potential of color. One Sunday page shows Skeezix and Uncle Walt walking into a modernist painting, replete with effects culled from Picasso, Kandinsky, and Matisse. The remarkable final panel complicates the already complex depiction of pictures within pictures by having Walt and

Frank King, *Gasoline Alley*, 1930.

Milt Gross. *Dave's Delicatessen*, 6/10/28.

E.C. Segar. *Thimble Theatre*, 12/3/33.
5 panels, Sunday.

Frederick Burr Opper.
Happy Hooligan.

Skeezix blur into trails of paint. Their dialogue is reminiscent of Poe's poem "A Dream Within a Dream." An artist resembling a cubistic Picasso warns them, "There's no way out," to which Walt replies, "I thought perhaps he was right but I begin to see daylight." Skeezix has the final word: "That was an awful dream Uncle Walt, or was it a dream?"

King, Sterrett, Herriman, and McCay helped transform the comic strip into something more than it was intended to be. The comics were designed as the newspaper equivalent of Coney Island—a structured form of release for the lower and middle classes. Yet within a medium considered to be entertainment and not art, these artists and a surprising number of others produced notable work. Rube Goldberg, TAD, Fontaine Fox, Billy DeBeck (*Barney Google*), E.C. Segar (*Popeye*), Milt Gross (*Count Screwloose*), and Otto Messmer (*Felix the Cat*) all contributed to the visionary spirit that animates and distinguishes American popular culture.

Mass Appeal:
The Development of Realism,
Sequential Narrative,
and Social Satire

by Jerry Robinson

Chester Gould. *Dick Tracy*, 8/4/57.

Harold Gray. *Little Orphan Annie*, 9/22/45.

Roy Crane. From "It Takes Two to Tangle," 1928.

Hal Foster. *Tarzan*, 1/26/36. 3 Panels. Sunday.

Burne Hogarth. *Tarzan*, 9/18/49. Sunday.
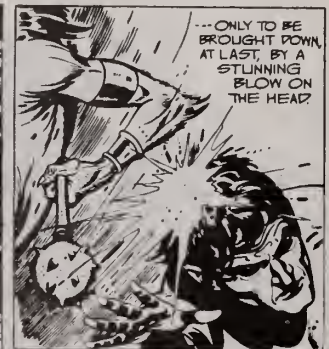
While many great cartoonists played an important role in the evolution of the continuity strip, among them Winsor McCay (*Little Nemo*), Charles W. Kahles (*Hairbreadth Harry*), Sidney Smith (*The Gumps*), and Harold Gray (*Little Orphan Annie*), the pivotal figure was Roy Crane, who in 1924 created *Wash Tubbs* (retitled *Captain Easy* in 1932). Crane had a great influence on his contemporaries, many of whom consider him one of the finest artists and storytellers the medium has produced. His constant striving for new pictorial effects led him to experiment with the Ben Day process, a mechanical method of achieving halftones. He became a master of the technique, using it with exquisite taste to accent his beautifully composed black-and-white drawings, giving them an amazing range of depth, tone, and texture. Crane, however, was a step away from the purely illustrative adventure strip. Until his later work on *Buz Sawyer*, his drawings remained a blend of the comic and realistic.

The appearance of two epic strips, *Tarzan* and *Buck Rogers*, established the adventure genre in the comics. Coincidentally, these strips were introduced on the same day: January 7, 1929. *Tarzan* was illustrated by two diverse talents: Hal Foster, whose *Prince Valiant* was to establish him as one of the masters of the art, and Burne Hogarth, whose command of classic composition and dynamic use of form and line brought the comics to another plateau of achievement. They applied the disciplines of the illustrator: expert draftsmanship, a thorough knowledge of anatomy, and the mastery of composition, perspective, and light and shade. Each Sunday's episode was a visual tour de force. Foster was unsparing in his devotion to detail, depicting with remarkable authenticity the architecture, heraldic insignia, arms, customs, and life-style of the Arthurian period. While Foster's vision was that of the school of romantic illustrators personified by Howard Pyle and N. C. Wyeth, Hogarth drew his inspiration from the anatomical realism of the Renaissance. It is interesting to note that in both *Tarzan* and *Prince Valiant* Foster and Hogarth eschewed balloons in favor of the printed narrative beneath the drawing. This permitted
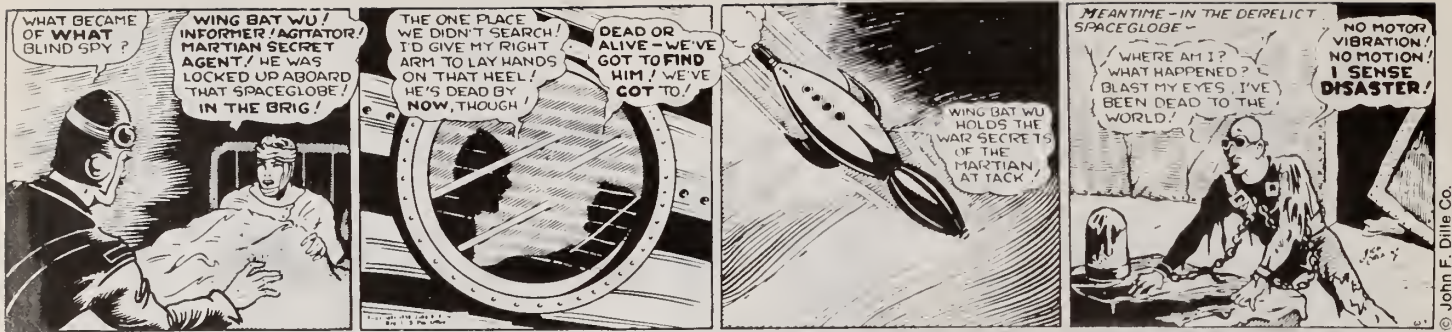
Dick Calkins. *Buck Rogers*, 1939.
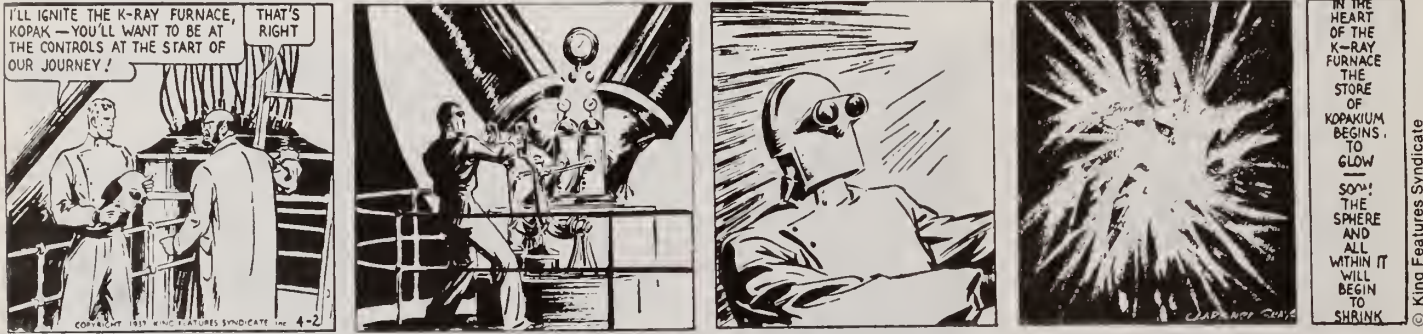
Clarence Gray. *Brick Bradford*, 4/2/37.

Alex Raymond. *Flash Gordon*, "Flaming Death," 11/28/37.

greater freedom in the composition without intruding on the picture plane or disturbing the aesthetics of the strip. Alex Raymond in *Flash Gordon* was also to employ this device in the tradition of the French nineteenth-century *imagerie d'Epinal*. While preserving a picture-book quality, it did lessen the sense of immediacy and unfolding drama provided by placing spoken words in the balloons.

Tarzan reflected a nostalgic longing for simpler times when man could come to grips with his environment and exercise control over his destiny—pitting his strength and guile against the forces of nature, wild beasts, and evil men. It also embodies the ultimate myth of white supremacy, in which a single Caucasian dominates the entire African continent. *Buck Rogers*, on the other hand, was man's dream of the future, of solutions to social ills and injustices—an escape to other planets where man employed technology to survive and to combat the evil creatures of other worlds. Both strips were adaptations from works of fiction,

Tarzan from *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and *Buck Rogers* from "Armageddon 2419," a short story by Philip Nowlan, who collaborated with Richard Calkins on the comic strip. Many of the fantastic developments pictured in *Buck Rogers* have since been realized. In the first sequence alone, there were rocket guns and explosive bullets, jumping belts, hovercraft, radar-equipped robots, television-controlled rockets, and a landing on the moon. In a 1939 sequence, six years before Hiroshima, *Buck Rogers* even described a prototype of the atomic bomb.

The comic strip has been described as the great and indigenous record of life in the United States, not only reflecting society but helping to mold it. A case in point is the development of the crime strip, epitomized by Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*, launched in 1931. Gould was motivated by the crime wave during the Prohibition era; by the gangsters Al Capone, John Dillinger, Machine Gun Kelly, and Bonnie and Clyde; and by the new folk heroes of law enforcement, J. Edgar Hoover and
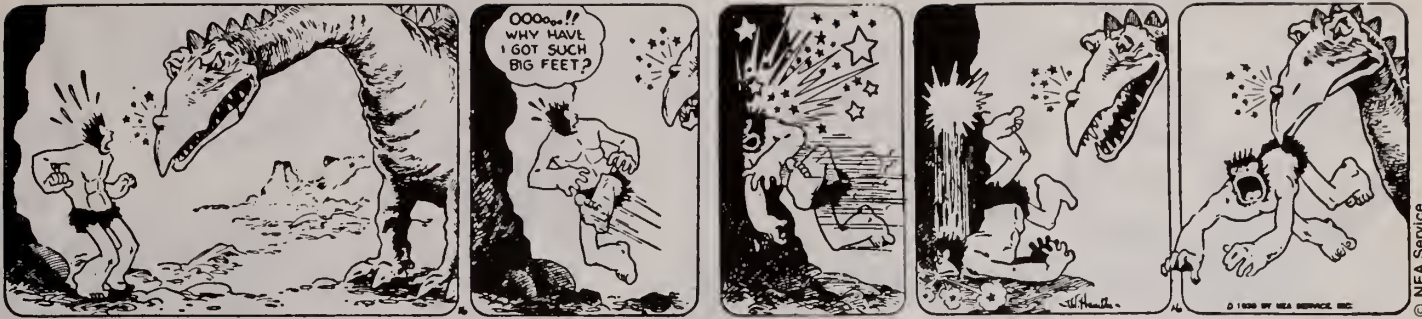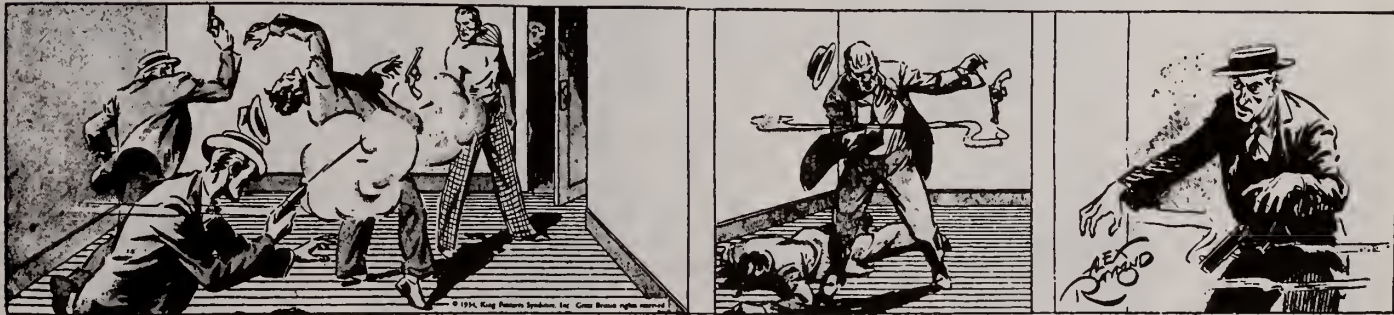
V.T. Hamlin. *Alley Oop*, 1933.

Milt Caniff. *Terry and the Pirates*, 1940.

Alex Raymond and Dashiell Hammett. *Agent X-9*, 1934.

his G-men. Gould introduced a new hard-hitting realism dealing with contemporary themes. It marked a radical and historical departure: the word "comics" became a misnomer; these strips were no longer just funny or romantic. Tracy is in the line of fictional sleuths ranging from Edgar Allen Poe's C. August Dupin and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes to the heroes of the hard-boiled-detective action story, a form pioneered by Dashiell Hammett and Erle Stanley Gardner in the *Black Mask*, a pulp magazine of the twenties.

Poe attributed the popularity of his stories to "the ludicrous heightened into the grotesque; the fearful coloured into the horrible; the witty exaggerated into the burlesque; the singular wrought out into the strange and mystical." It was Gould's succession of bizarre villains that caught the public's imagination. The grotesque gallery in *Dick Tracy* includes Pruneface, Flattop, the Rodent, the Brow, Flyface, the Mole, B. O. Plenty, and Gravel

Gertie. Gould utilized story-telling techniques that were perfectly suited to the comic idiom—that allowed for no ambiguity. His style of drawing is like a blueprint. Everything is in stark contrast, as if caught in a searchlight. Tracy always stands out in flat black. Gould meticulously details—often in extreme close-up—the ingenious devices of the villain and the methodology of crime detection (forecasting the use of some devices, such as the two-way wrist TV and radio, before their invention), and labels are freely used to make everything crystal clear.

Nineteen thirty-four must be considered the vintage year of the adventure and satiric strip. It saw the birth of Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon*, *Jungle Jim*, and *Secret Agent X9*; Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*; Lee Falk's *Mandrake the Magician*; and Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*. Raymond was one of the most brilliant creators of illustrative fantasy. The characters, however, were mostly one-dimen-

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Milt Caniff. *Terry and the Pirates*, 11/29/41.

DICK TRACY

Chester Gould. *Dick Tracy*, 8/12/44.
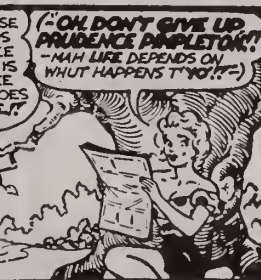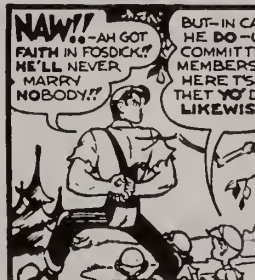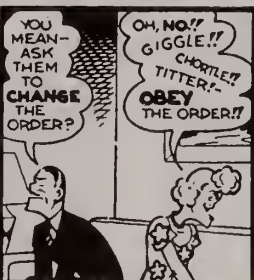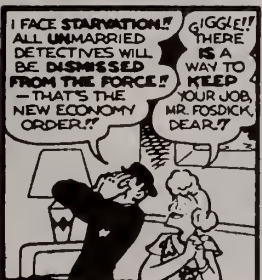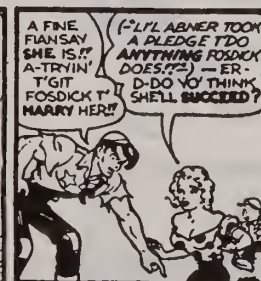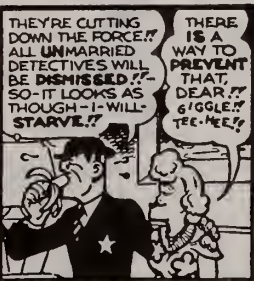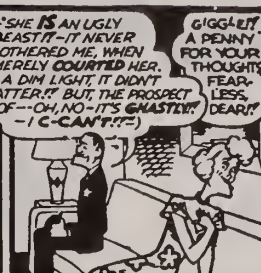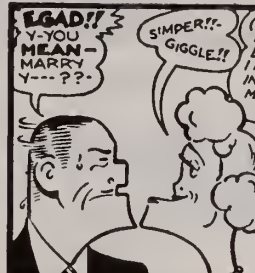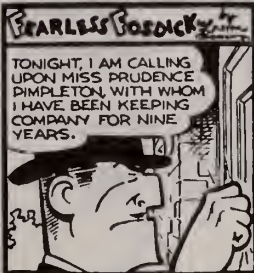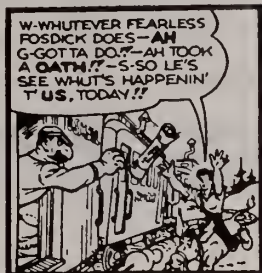
Al Capp. *Li'l Abner*, 1951, Sunday.

sional: Flash is the blond, handsome hero; Dale is Flash's strikingly beautiful companion; and the supporting cast are suitably crafty tyrants and gorgeous, seductive femmes fatales. What made *Flash Gordon* a classic strip was Raymond's artistry and the rich imagination he brought to his conceptions of the future. Federico Fellini, who started his career as a cartoonist, described the strip's impact on him: "Flash Gordon...appeared instantly as the model of a hero insuperable, a real hero, even if his achievements were in remote and fantastic words...at times in my films, I seek to find the color and verve of Flash Gordon and his world."

Scorchy Smith, which Noel Sickles took over in 1934, pioneered the sparkling black-and-white style which brought the art of chiaroscuro into the comics. Sickles influenced generations of cartoonists, particularly his close friend and associate, Milton Caniff. It remained, however, for Caniff in *Terry and the Pirates* to fuse all the storytelling techniques of the adventure strip.

Caniff developed and integrated the narrative and its visual expression into a uniform aesthetic balance. In his visual conceptions he utilized film-making techniques and adapted them to his own purposes. Caniff's stories in *Terry* and later in *Steve Canyon* are equal to his art. The plots are intricate, with a cast of indelible characters; the dialogue sharp, witty, and idiomatic. Caniff's only peer when it comes to the cliffhanger and suspense is Alfred Hitchcock.

One of the finest and most successful writers who has been attracted to the comics is Lee Falk. Falk was the creator of two strips, *Mandrake the Magician* (with Phil Davis) and *The Phantom*. Created in 1936 with Ray Moore, *The Phantom* has the distinction of introducing the first costumed superhero, a precursor of Superman.

Social satire in the tradition of Rabelais, Jonathan Swift, and Mark Twain came to the comics in 1934 with Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*. The strip's humor is rooted in the American tradition of vernacular tall tales that stretches back to Davy

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Garry Trudeau. *Doonesbury*, 3/19/74.
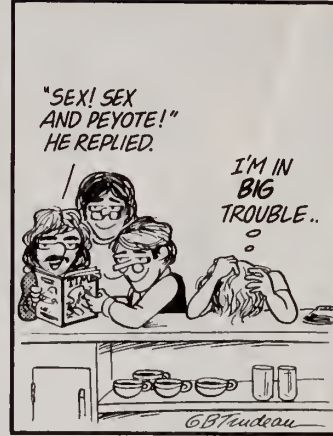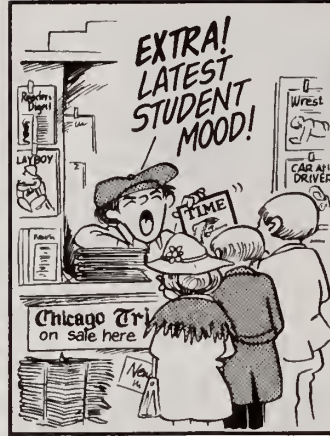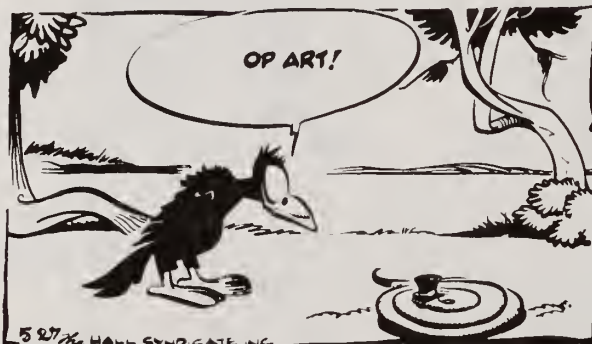
Walt Kelly. *Pogo*, 5/27/68.
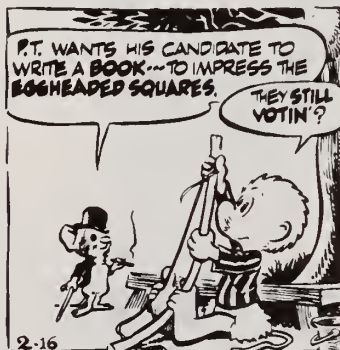
Walt Kelly. *Pogo*, 2/16/68.
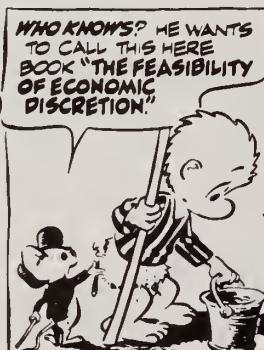
Crockett and Paul Bunyan. Over the years Capp created an extraordinary collection of grotesques rivaled only by those of Chester Gould. In fact, it is Gould's *Dick Tracy* that Capp parodies in his strip within a strip, *Fearless Fosdick*, whose hero is "the Ideel of Every Red-Blooded American Boy." The bizarre citizens of Abner's native Dogpatch include: General Bullmoose ("What's good for General Bullmoose is good for the USA"), Evil-eye Fleegle, Hairless Joe, Senator Jack S. Phogbound, Joe Btfsplk, Sir Cecil Cesspool, and J. Roaringham Fatback, the hog tycoon. The women—Daisy Mae, Moonbeam McSwine, Stupefyin' Jones, Impassionata von Climax, and Tobacco Rhoda, whose love techniques resemble those of the Boston Strangler, are, by contrast, usually courageous and generously endowed. Capp was at his allegorical best in the epics of the Shmoos and, later, the Kigmies. The Shmoos are the world's most amiable creatures, supplying all men's needs, and the Kigmies are the epitome of masochism, serving as targets for all human aggression. Both were ob-

viously a menace to the establishment. Capp's outrageous postulations and Rabelaisian wit led John Steinbeck to call him the best satirist since Laurence Sterne: "Capp has taken our customs, our dreams, our habits, our thoughts, our social structure, our economics, and examined them gently like amusing bugs."

Walt Kelly, another rare comic genius in the mold of Herriman, Goldberg, and Segar, contributed a new dimension of political allegory in *Pogo*. Kelly's brilliant satire revolved around Pogo, "a possum by trade," but involved a seemingly endless cast of delightful, anthropomorphic creatures including the raffish Albert the Alligator; Deacon Muskrat; a prideful hound, Beauregard Bugleboy; Snavely the Snake; a gloomy realist, Boll Weevil; and innumerable bit players who Kelly imagined as working in other strips on their days off. Kelly's art is as enchanting as his stories. Every detail of the Okefenokee Swamp is pampered and caressed with pen strokes of infinite variety, conveying contour and texture and giving
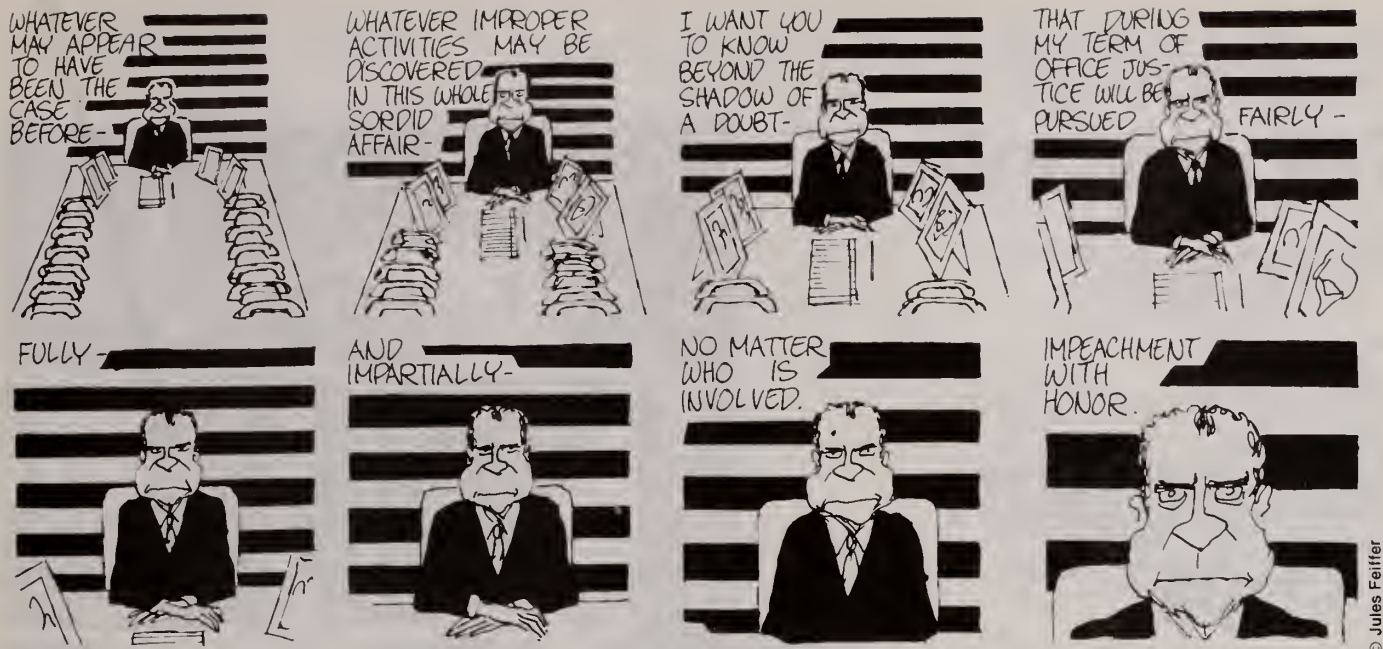
Jules Feiffer. 1974.

Harold Gray. *Little Orphan Annie*, 7/8/44.

the strip a rich tonal quality. The calligraphy is an essential part of the art. Two characters who have lettering styles of their own that suggest vocal personality and tone are Deacon Muskrat (pious Old English letters), and P. T. Bridgeport (circus-poster type). The latter bears a striking resemblance to P. T. Barnum. Although *Little Orphan Annie*, which appeared a decade earlier, became a platform for Harold Gray's rightist philosophy, it was Kelly who enlarged the scope of the comics with his political allegories. Simple J. Malarkey, a snarling, jowly dog, bears a startling resemblance to Senator Joseph McCarthy; Nelson Rockefeller and George Romney are portrayed as wind-up dolls (Romney ran backwards); President Lyndon Johnson appears in the form of a nearsighted Texas longhorn with a bulbous nose; Nixon is depicted as a spider; and a hyena looks suspiciously like Spiro Agnew.

Capp's and Kelly's thinly disguised political satires met with fierce opposition from many newspapers which held that such material did not belong in comics. Their battles paved the way for successors like Jules Feiffer, who developed his own form of political satire combined with psychological insight, and Garry Trudeau, whose brilliant satire, *Doonesbury*, became in 1975 the first comic strip to win a Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.

Representing Force: From Superman to the Fantastic Four

by
John Carlin
and
Gary Groth

Will Eisner. *The Spirit*, splash page, 9/19/48.

© Will Eisner

The comic book was invented in the 1930s as a fusion of newspaper strips and illustrated pulp fiction. The first modern American comic book, *Funnies on Parade*, was produced as a commercial giveaway by Procter and Gamble. The earliest and most important comic books to develop original themes and characters (instead of relying upon existing newspaper strips) were *Detective Comics* in 1937 and *Action Comics* in 1938. The comics owe some of their most memorable characters to the comic book—Superman, Batman, Captain America, Wonder Woman, and Spider-Man—as well as some of their finest artists—Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, Jack Cole, Harvey Kurtzman, and Carl Barks (who brilliantly transformed the inchoate Donald Duck into an astonishingly complex, sympathetic character and created many other characters for Walt Disney, Uncle Scrooge foremost among them).

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created Superman in the early thirties while still in their teens. Superman made his first appearance in *Action Comics* in 1938. Until the Marvel Comics revolution of the early sixties, he was the prototype for all comic superheroes, providing the impetus for the rapid expansion of the comic book industry during the forties. Superman, more than any other comics character, has become part of America's machine-age mythology—what Marshall Fishwick calls our "fakelore." It's interesting to note that superficially crude strips like *Superman, Little Orphan Annie*, and *Dick Tracy* have made the greatest impact on mass consciousness, while strips like *Little Nemo, Krazy Kat*, and *Polly and Her Pals*, however much one might admire their styles and themes, are fundamentally too complex to succeed on a mass scale.

The comic-book publishers rejected the abstract poetic fantasies that distinguish many early newspaper strips in favor of a more representational style and the heroic derring-do found in early pulp magazines. Comic-book stories have traditionally revolved around the moralistic adventures of a readily identifiable male figure who has extraordinary skill or powers. Superman's descent from Krypton to Earth symbolized the domestication of the science-fiction and jungle plot of the adventure strip in the comic book.

In addition to helping create the myths Americans live by, the comic book medium also gave art-
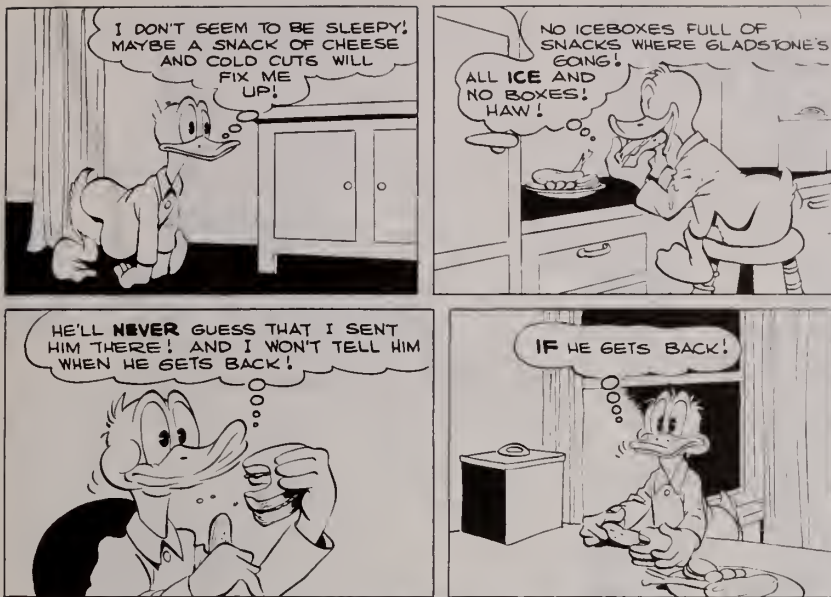
Carl Barks. Donald Duck, "Luck of the North," December 1949.
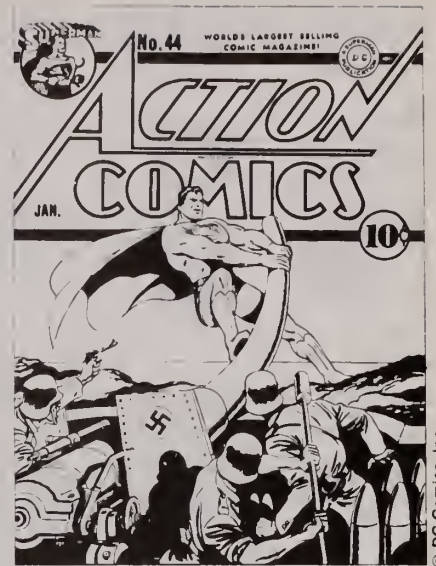
Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. *Superman* cover, 1942.

Jerry Robinson. *Batman* cover, 1942.

ists like Will Eisner and Jack Kirby the opportunity to develop a distinct and personal vision through their work. Eisner's *The Spirit* (first published in 1940) bridged the gap between the comic strip and comic book. The strip's protagonist was Denny Colt, who "died," became the Spirit, and made his crime-fighting headquarters in Wildwood Cemetery. Eisner was the first artist in comics to broaden the visual syntax of the medium. His sensitive use of dramatic emphasis, his manipulation of time, his attention to tone, and his skill at felicitously combining words and drawings made *The Spirit* a classic of the form and a historical landmark.

Jack Kirby possessed the most fertile imagination in the history of the comic book, and his influence—for good or ill—has been the most ecumenical and enduring. It was primarily Kirby's imagination that fueled the early Marvel comics, and Kirby is to a great extent responsible for Marvel's present reputation. He began drawing professionally at the Max Fleischer animation studio as a fill-in on *Betty Boop* and *Popeye* cartoons. He quickly moved on to comics, doing work in the late thirties for *Wow* and *Jumbo*. His impor-

tant early work included developing the first complete issue of *Captain Marvel Adventures* for Fawcett Publications; creating (with Joe Simon) *Captain America* for the Timely comics group; creating *The Sandman*, *The Newsboy Legion*, *Manhunter*, and *Boy Commandos* for National Periodical Publications; and *Boy's Ranch* and *Boy Explorers* for Harvey. He invented the comics romance genre with *My Love*, and in the late fifties created *Challengers of the Unknown* for National. He drew stories in every conceivable genre—war, western, romance, superhero, monster, mystery, and crime—before rejoining Stan Lee (for whom he had previously worked at Timely in the 1940s) in 1959. Kirby spent several years drawing idiotic monster stories before he, Stan Lee, and Steve Ditko revitalized Marvel Comics, the superhero genre, and the comics form in general, in the early sixties.

Kirby's style had evolved into one that brilliantly portrayed the sweeping, unmitigated force of flawed heroes who moved with balletic monumentality and engaged in exhausting perpetual conflict. Kirby drew the early issues of *The Hulk, The Avengers, The X-Men, Captain America, The Fan-*
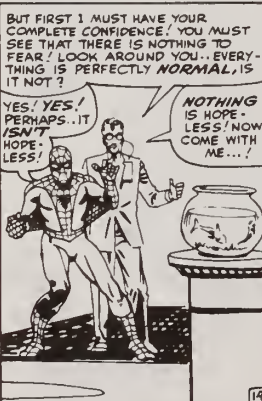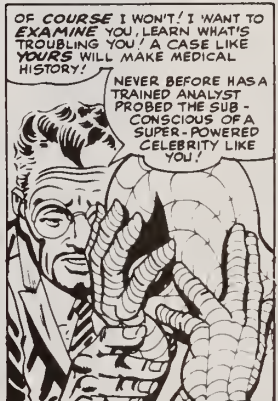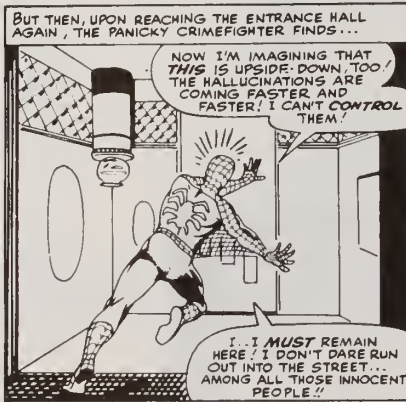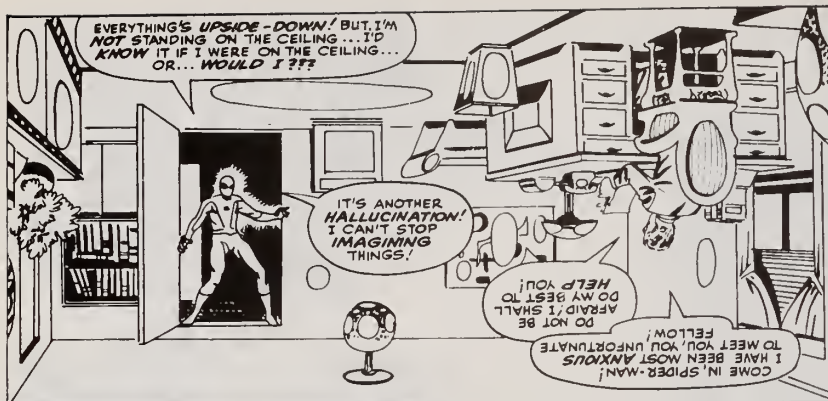
Stan Lee and Steve Ditko.
Page and three panels from
"Spider-Man Goes Mad,"
Spider-Man #25, 1965.

tastic Four, Thor, and Sgt. Fury, creating the cast and developing the structural and conceptual framework for each title. Kirby was one of a handful of artists to invest super-heroes with a personal sensibility that was sufficiently unique and original to transcend the inherent banality of the subject matter without betraying it. Kirby's limitations as an artist spring from his strengths; his entire approach is antithetical to intellectual expression or growth. Still, from the early to the late sixties his imagination was staggering. In addition to his stylistic virtuosity, Kirby continually created characters for every book he worked on—characters that form the backbone of the Marvel Universe and that are used and reused by current Marvel writers and artists. In *The Fantastic Four* alone, he created such characters as Dr. Doom, the Watcher, the Puppet Master, the Frightful Four, Dragon Man, The Red Ghost, Galactus, the Silver Surfer, the Black Panther, the Inhumans, and literally dozens more.

Stan Lee, untouched by art or pretension, wrote the dialogue for (and often co-plotted) Kirby's stories. Lee's soap-opera banalities, platitudinous moralizing, and jaunty banter gave Kirby's frenetic work scale. In a way, Lee's dialogue mitigated the grandiose proportions of Kirby's work and brought a human dimension to his sweeping epics.

Steve Ditko was the third of the triumvirate of talents that revolutionized Marvel in the sixties. In comparison with Kirby's monumental, idealized figures, Ditko's characters were drenched in the commonplace; often his characters and their milieu bordered on the grotesque. Ditko's influence was not as great as Kirby's, his style less outwardly appealing and less easily imitated—more idiosyncratic and quirky. Ditko defined Spider-Man as the first anti-hero by drawing and plotting the first thirty-eight issues of the title. He vivified the Hulk's early, tragic qualities; brought a warped, hallucinatory imagination to the occult *Dr. Strange* series; and created many characters that Marvel still employs today.

In the history of comic books, cluttered with banality and repetition, Kirby's work is an anomaly. There may have been greater artists than Kirby, but there has been none with a greater imagination.
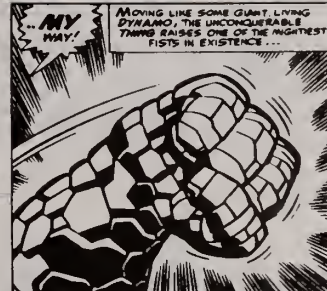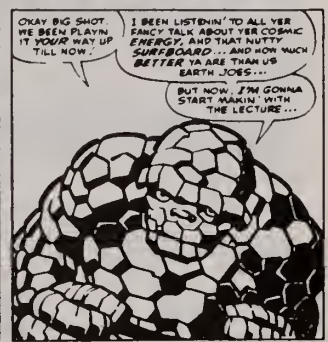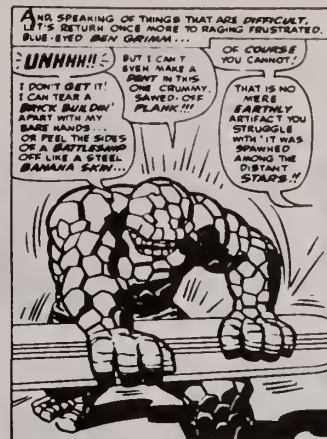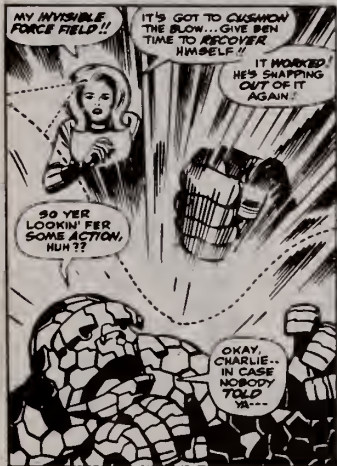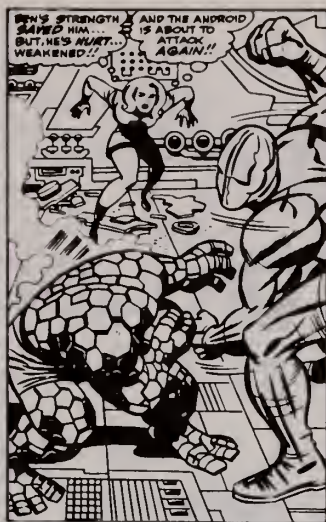
Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Panels from "And So It Ends....," *Fantastic Four* #71, 1968; "Where Soars the Silver Surfer," *Fantastic Four* #72, 1968, and "When Strikes the Silver Surfer," *Fantastic Four* #55, 1966.

Nothing Is Sacred:
From EC to Underground Comix
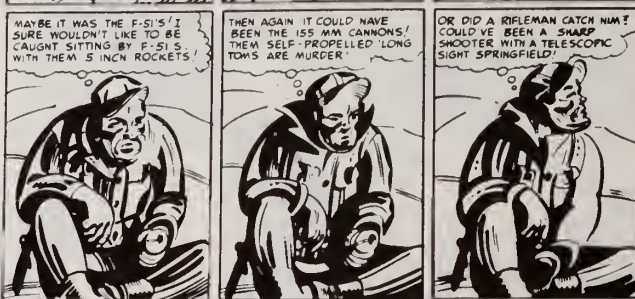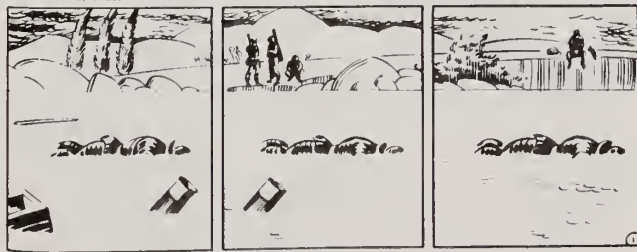
by John Carlin and Kim Thompson

By 1950, the American comic book had lost any serious claims to art, high or low. The medium's initial crude energy had given way to repetitive adolescent fantasies of power and childish fantasies of innocence, executed without grace or originality. There were individual exceptions, such as Jack Cole's *Plastic Man* and Carl Barks's *Uncle Scrooge*, but it took E.C. to create an entire trend of significant comics work.

E.C. Comics' self-proclaimed "New Trend" comics line was created under the aegis of publisher William M. Gaines, a charismatic father-figure to his editors, writers, and artists. Together, they explored the dark side of the American dream during the fifties. Gaines's titles, which encompassed war, horror, crime, science-fiction, and humor comics, were linked by a cynical awareness of the realities of American society that had a decidedly subversive quality to it.

Several of the E.C. artists developed formal qualities that have never been equaled in the field. Bernard Krigstein, who went on to become a fine artist

and illustrator, explored the possibilities of narrative rhythm and panel design in such stories as "Master Race" in addition to introducing painterly concepts into the medium; Jack Davis (now one of America's highest-paid humorous illustrators) and Graham Ingels adapted the virtues of classical humorous and dramatic illustration to such notorious tales of gory terror as "Foul Play"; and Al Williamson and Wally Wood revitalized science fiction with their glittery, romantic depictions of the future.

By far the most influential figure, however, was the editor/writer/artist Harvey Kurtzman, who in the three comic books he supervised redefined both the dramatic and the comedic forms in comics. In the war titles *Two-Fisted Tales* and *Frontline Combat*, Kurtzman combined a rigorously consistent narrative design with an insatiable thirst for authenticity and a clear moral viewpoint. Although most of the artists who worked with him were highly skilled and followed through on his intentions admirably, the finest pieces remain those he

Harvey Kurtzman. "Corpse on the Imjin," *Two-Fisted Tales* #25, 1952.

LI'L AB'R   BY " "

AS YOU MIGHT RE-
CALL, THE LAST STRIP
ENDED AS USUAL
WITH A CRISIS THAT
LOOKED LIKE ONE
LITTLE AB'R WOULD
NEVER GET OUT OF.
NATURALLY, THAT
HE WOULD NEVER
GET OUT OF THE
CRISIS IS RIDICU-
LOUS SINCE IN
THAT CASE THE
STRIP COULD NOT
GO ON, AND SO...

POOPEYE   BY " "

STARCHIE   BY " "

METT AND JUFF   BY " "

Will Elder. *Cartoon digest*, Mad.

© 1983 William M. Gaines

Harvey Kurtzman. Cover for *Mad* #1, 1952

TALES CALCULATED TO DRIVE YOU
MAD

© 1983 William M. Gaines
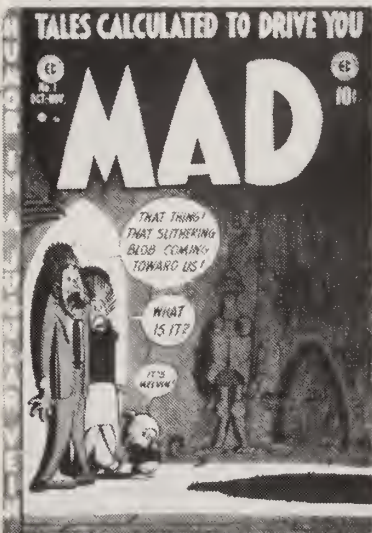
Harvey Kurtzman and Bill Elder. Title frame from "Howdy Dooit," *Mad* #18, 1954.

© 1983 William M. Gaines

drew himself, such as "Corpse on the Imjin." Kurtz-
man visualized his panels as agonized masses in
eternal conflict, delineating them with a vigor that
gave the nearly abstract figures a stunning impact.
As a writer, he shied away from the flag-waving
romanticism then prevalent in comics in favor of a
dark, fatalistic vision of men in combat.

Kurtzman's other contribution was Mad. Mad
started out as a comic-book parody; it quickly grew
to engulf other media and, eventually, social and
political commentary. In the context of a country
turning on itself in paranoid "patriotism," Kurtz-
man's Mad was a voice for reason and skepticism
that left its imprint on a whole generation of young-
sters. Kurtzman wrote all twenty-three of the comic-
book issues and edited the first five magazine
issues; he was aided by several talented artists
(among them Davis and Wood), but his most con-
sistent and outrageous partner-in-crime was Will
Elder, whose meticulous, line-for-line imitations of
Kurtzman's targets added an additional dose of
poison to satires of such prominent comic figures
as Mickey Mouse, Superman, and Archie.

After leaving E.C., Kurtzman created several
more satirical magazines, including Trump and
Help! (The latter featured early illustrations by
many artists who would later go on to become the
founding fathers of the underground movement)
and eventually settled into the comfort of produc-
ing Little Annie Fanny for Playboy magazine—
which he has now been doing for twenty-one years.

The anarchic seeds Kurtzman had sown in both
Mad and Help! bloomed as the sixties wore on and
American culture polarized itself into young versus
old. A thriving West Coast hippie subculture began
to develop its own media network. This network ex-
tended into New York alternative newspapers such
as the East Village Other, which, like most
newspapers, contained comics. Taking advantage
of the freedom accorded by the underground
press, the underground artists openly discussed
subjects previously repressed in comics illustra-
tion. While at times salacious or neurotically self-
obsessed, the greatest underground artists
brought to the comics a poetic sensibility and
graphic style that had been sadly lacking in tradi-

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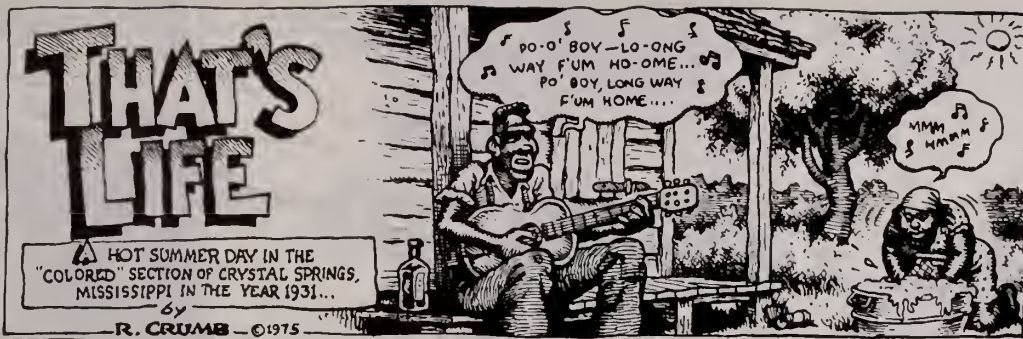
R. Crumb. Panels from "That's Life," Arcade #4, 1952.

R. Crumb. Cover for Zap #1, 1967.

R. Crumb. Sketchbook drawing.

tional strips.

R. Crumb produced what is commonly considered the first underground comic book, *Zap Comix*, in 1968. The creator of two of the most well-known modern comic characters, Fritz the Cat and Mr. Natural, Crumb brings to his work a remarkable attention to visual detail and ordinary speech. He infuses his uncanny observations with a sense of rhythm and kinetic flux that successfully recaptures the early blues and jazz styles he admires. In addition to embodying the spirit of his age in the rhythm and focus of his images ("Keep on Trucking" is an unavoidable example), stories like "Mr. Natural's 719th Meditation" demonstrate Crumb's unique comic idealism. His misanthropic guru, Mr. Natural, possesses slapstick superpowers which make him a sort of pop Socrates. The story begins as it ends, in an empty desert landscape. In between, a world comes into being and destroys itself. Like a dime-store version of Thomas Cole's epic series *The Course of the Empire* (c. 1840) Crumb's cautionary tale ironically posits the transcendence of the human spirit over the transitory nature of culture and authority.

Other archetypal first-generation underground work includes the taboo-shattering grotesquerie of S. Clay Wilson; the psychedelia of Rick Griffin and Victor Moscoso; the urban-guerrilla politics of Spain Rodriguez; the hippie-culture slapstick of Gilbert Shelton; the screwball satire of Jay Lynch and Skip Williamson; the "hard-bop comicking" of Kim Deitch; and the surreal social parodies of Justin Green.

With the advent of the mid-seventies, the classic undergrounds saw several major setbacks, including the death of their natural audience, the Haight-Ashbury culture, and tightening obscenity laws that killed off much of their distribution. Worse yet, though, was a slackening of creative energy.

Partly in response to this, a new breed of underground cartoonists developed. These cartoonists saw comics as a potential fine art rather than as a street art, and their work reflected this. *Arcade*, born in 1975, served as a rallying point. It included

R. Crumb. Mr. Natural's 719th Meditation. From Zap #4, 1970.
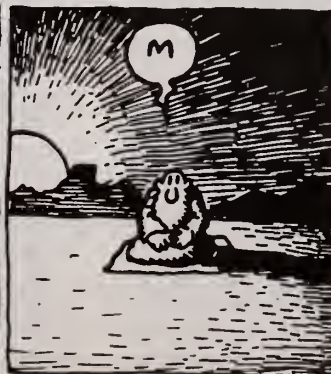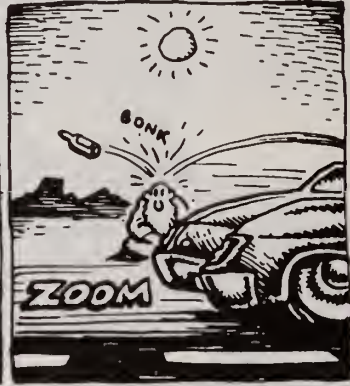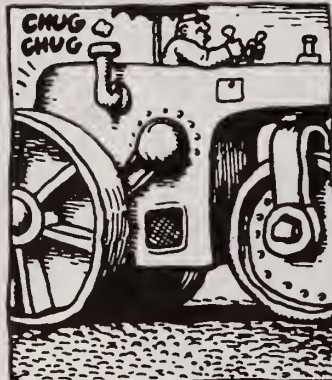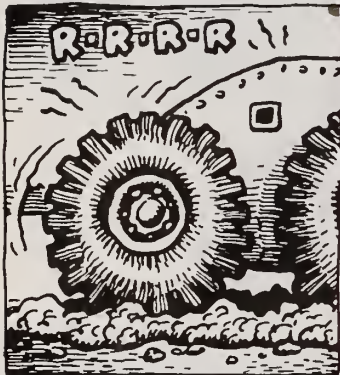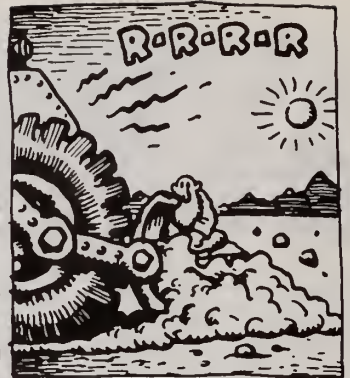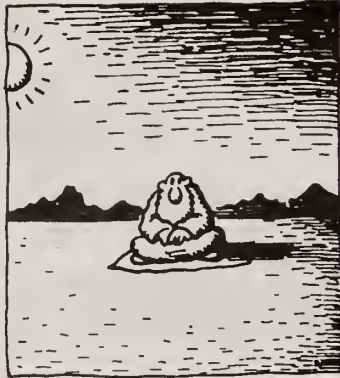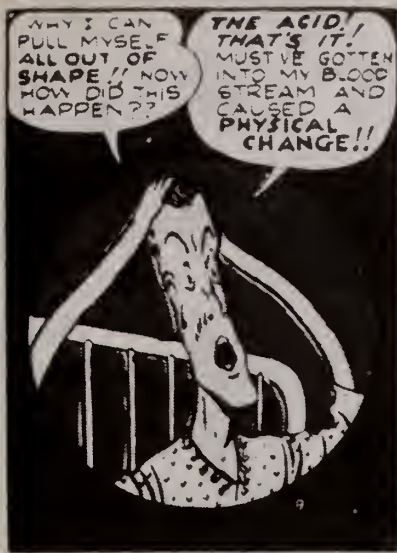
Jack Cole. Panel from *Plastic Man* #1, 8/41.

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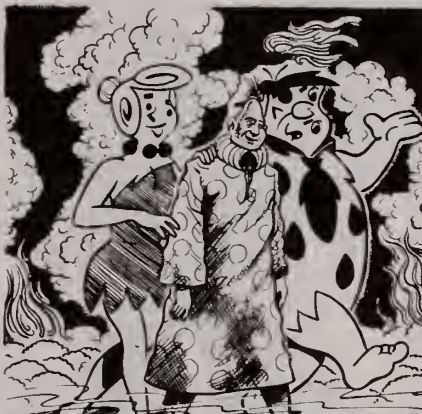
R. Crumb.
Panel from
"Definitely a
Case of
Derangement," 1967.

© 1983 R. Crumb
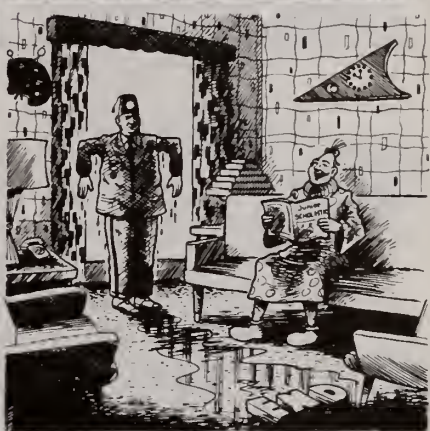
Bill Griffith. Final page from *Zip Code*, c. 1979.

© 1983 Bill Griffith

work by the earlier generation of cartoonists, including Crumb; but the most interesting work flowed from the hands of co-editors Art Spiegelman and Bill Griffith, whose wit and formal sophistication gave a new impetus to the underground-comics genre.

Griffith turned the exploits of Zippy the Pinhead from a seemingly dead-end situation into a vital and sophisticated work of art. His compositional skills in *Zippy* are formidable—he juxtaposes fictional characters with recognizable pop icons in a casually surreal fashion and employs an impressive variety of framing devices and points of view which hark back to early masters like Gustave Doré and Winsor McCay.

Art Spiegelman pioneered the development of what might be called the post-modern comic strip, a form characterized by elaborate tissues of internal reference which demand to be read dialectically. His early strip "Ace Hole, Midget Detective" forced the issue of art in the comics through its use of Picasso as a character and through its clever use of cross-references and hidden formal echoes. Spiegelman's strips are so densely layered in terms of narrative and graphic design that they ultimately become comics which are more about themselves as a medium than about the subjects they represent.

Arcade succumbed after six issues, but Spiegelman rallied in 1980 with *Raw*, a meticulously produced ten-by-fourteen-inch magazine of graphic art which he edits with Françoise Mouly. Half devoted to reprints of European comics and half to American avant-garde material, *Raw* has been characterized by its sharp, self-aware explorations of the comics format. In the first issue, Spiegelman playfully connected fine-arts, comics, pulp thrillers, and printing technology in his miniature color-comics insert *Two-Fisted Painters* (Kurtzman again!), while subsequent issues have spotlighted his *Maus*, a first-person cartoon novel in which his formal experimentation has been de-emphasized (but not abandoned) in favor of a forceful, novelistic approach to telling the story of a Holo-

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D-D-Dot's all, folks!

Art Spiegelman. Final panel from "Zip-a-Tunes and Moire Melodies," 1972.

© Art Spiegelman

SO LONG, FOLKS!

Clarence Gray. *Brick Bradford.* © King Features Syndicate

CAN THE EARTH BE SAVED?

It might already be TOO LATE!

OH MY GOD!!

R. Crumb. Sketchbook drawing.

© 1983 R. Crumb

What are you doing in here, SON?

Please don't bother me sir. I'm trying to dis-arm this Thermonuclear Device.

© 1981 G. PANTER

What?

I'm afraid I have n't the foggiest notion.

Gary Panter. First page from *Jimbo, Raw One-Shot,* 3/31/81.

© 1983 Gary Panter

© 1983 William M. Gaines

Harvey Kurtzman. Title panel from "Air Burst," *Frontline Combat* #4, 1952.

caust victim in funny-animal terms.

In addition to serving as a showcase for Spiegelman's continued development, *Raw* has brought together a group of artists who best represent the post-underground style. They include Mark Beyer, Jerry Moriarity, Charles Burns, and Gary Panter. Panter originated what has become known as the "punk" style, a form which made its first appearance in the late seventies in the Los Angeles fanzine *Slash*; Panter's *Jimbo* combines a raw immediate impact with sophisticated formal design.

The underground comics continue to be a vital and relatively uncompromised medium. Along with the graphic novel and the use of cartoon imagery in graffiti-oriented art, the movement is an affirmation of the comics as a dominant vehicle linking individual and collective expression. In many respects underground comics have moved into a position of secure marginality and from this perspective they continue to reflect and dissect the society in which they are found.

Art Spiegelman. Pages 2 and 3 from *Ace Hole, Midget Detective*, 1973-74.

THE CARTOON
More Vulgar Modernism
by
J. Hoberman

Mickey Mouse in the first sound cartoon, *Steamboat Willie* (1928).

Mickey Mouse Story Book, front cover.
Published by David McKay Co., 1931.

Still from Felix the Cat.
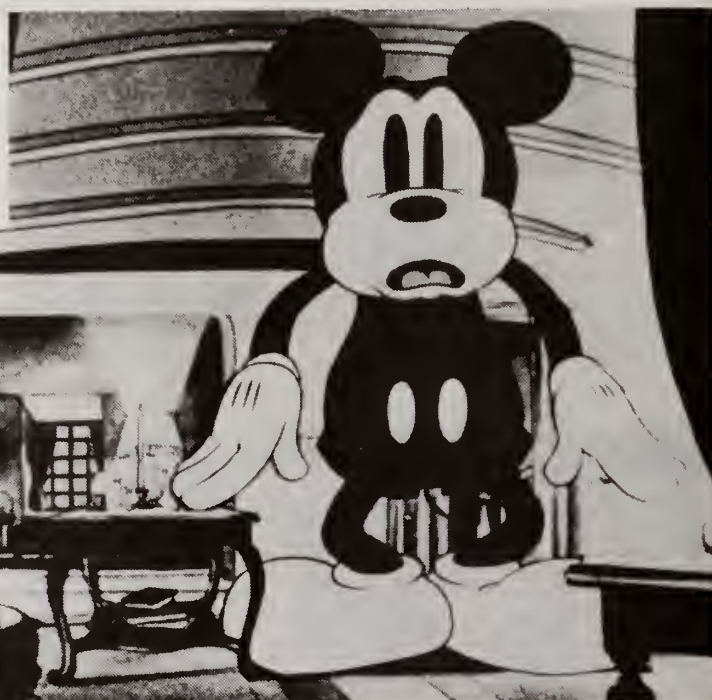
Mickey Mouse. Still from *Through the Mirror*, 1936.
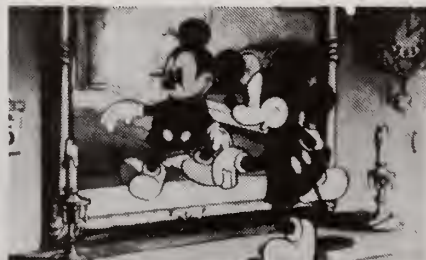
The development of the animated cartoon has numerous points of contact with that of the newspaper strip and, later, with the comic book. Winsor McCay, whose graphic genius is equally evident on screen and page, produced the first American line animation in 1909 when he translated his celebrated Sunday funny *Little Nemo in Slumberland* into motion pictures. Six years later, Rube Goldberg, whose name has become a household word, wrote and directed a number of cartoons distributed by Pathé. Bud Fisher's popular *Mutt and Jeff* formed the basis for another cartoon series. Since then such international icons as Krazy Kat, Happy Hooligan, the Katzenjammer Kids, Popeye, Dick Tracy, Superman, Little Lulu, Charlie Brown, Spider-Man, and Fritz the Cat have made the transition from comic strip to cartoon.

In the wake of the first animated superstar, Felix the Cat, the reverse traffic has been equally heavy. Characters who have moved from cartoons to com-

E.C. Segar. Publicity art for *Popeye*, c. 1938.

Winsor McCay. Still from *Gertie the Dinosaur*, 1909.

Walter Lantz. Woody Woodpecker, 1941-1960.
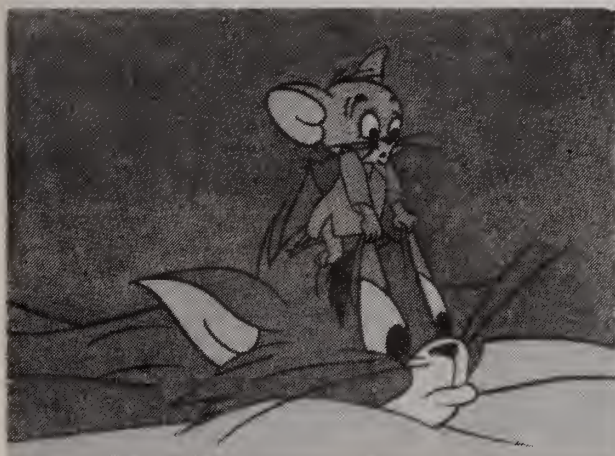
Hanna-Barbera. Tom and Jerry.

Max and Dave Fleischer. Betty Boop and Bimbo.

ics include: Mickey Mouse (and every Walt Disney character since), Betty Boop, Bugs Bunny, Woody Woodpecker, Heckle and Jeckle, Mighty Mouse, Casper the Friendly Ghost, and the Flintstones. In 1928, with *Steamboat Willie*, Walt Disney pioneered the sound cartoon, establishing an aesthetic dominance—challenged by the Fleischer brothers and, to a lesser degree, Ub Iwerks (Disney's early collaborator)—that would last for the next decade.

If Disney was the superego of studio animation, producing the most technically accomplished and elaborate cartoons ever made, Max and Dave Fleischer were its id. Their pre-1934 animations *Out of the Inkwell* and *Betty Boop* are characterized by anarchic fantasy, sexual innuendo, and nightmarish comedy. Widely telecast during the 1950s, these cartoons had a pronounced influence on a subsequent generation of underground filmmakers and cartoonists.

In 1936, Fred ["Tex"] Avery joined the small Warner Brothers cartoon unit and immediately set about boosting the volume, accelerating the tempo, and boosting the sex-violence-noise quotient of Warner's product. Opposing Disney-style character identification (as well as Disney's increasingly sentimental and fetishized naturalism), Avery and his cohorts made Warner's Looney Tunes an alienated spectacle of reflexive gags and distancing formalism. Avery carried his distinctive sensibility to MGM during World War II, while Bob Clampett and, particularly, Chuck Jones extended the heyday of Warner's into the early fifties. Frank Tashlin, who began his career as a Warner animator, proved the Typhoid Mary of the unit's vulgar modernism, transmitting the virus to radio, comic books, children's literature, and ultimately to cinema as director of the films of Jerry Lewis.

The rise of television forced the retrenchment of studio animation and of Hollywood production in

Elmer Fudd, Bugs Bunny, and Daffy Duck in Chuck Jones's *Rabbit Fire*, 1951.

Hanna-Barbera.
Production sketches for *The Jetsons*
(George and Elroy), 1966.

general. Cartoons were recycled for TV—throughout the fifties they provided the bulk of morning and late afternoon air fare, and, increasingly, were produced specifically for the new medium. Relatively inexpensive, made-for-TV cartoons took their visual and production cues from the drastically simplified, limited animation developed (along somewhat different lines) by both the dissident Disney spin-off United Productions of America and Chuck Jones's ridiculously minimal, highly influential Road Runner series. Jay Ward's *Crusader Rabbit* and *Rocky and Bullwinkle* (the latter animated by UPA veterans) are fondly remembered TV series of the fifties and early sixties; more commercially successful were the team of Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, who, having spawned *Tom and Jerry* during the forties, went on to populate the air waves with *Huckleberry Hound*, *Magilla Gorilla*, *Quick Draw McGraw* and, most spectacularly, *The Flintstones*, which made TV history as the first animated prime time situation comedy.

As *The Jetsons* succeeded *The Flintstones*, Japanese made-for-TV limited animation grew increasingly more dynamic, often overshadowing the American variety. Following the lead of underground comics, however, independent cel animators like Sally Cruikshank and Suzan Pitt have successfully rejuvenated American cartoons. (Cruikshank has almost single-handedly resurrected the Depression era "funny animal" cartoon; the underground cartoonist Michael McMillan has also developed this genre.) Other independents, notably George Griffin (*Flying Fur*) and Sandy Moore, have produced deconstructions of Hollywood studio cartoons.

As a mass-cultural form, the animated cartoon—like the comic strip before it—has been in steady decline since the mid-fifties. As computer graphics become increasingly necessary for commercial animation, it is likely that those classic works that are produced will be increasingly artisanal, eccentric, and historically self-aware.

John Fawcett. *Show Announcement 1971*, 1971. Collage and ink on paper, 20¾ x 28″. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of Dr. Marilyn and Ivan C. Karp. 76.8.

Dave Pascal. *General Custer: An American Rhapsody*, 1973. Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 96″. Collection of the artist.

Saul Steinberg. *Untitled*. Illustration from *Derrière le Miroir*, May, 1977.

© Saul Steinberg

What Is Comics Painting?

Comics are a twentieth-century art.

Photography, film, and comics developed simultaneously, producing a polyphony of images that transformed folk art into popular culture. Mass communication, functioning as a democratizing force, upset the centuries-old supremacy of the written word.

Marcel Duchamp remarked that painting, as the last manuscript art, remains unaltered after leaving the studio. Other manuscript arts become transformed into books, plays, films, videos, records, or cassettes: industrial society produces mass art for the masses.

Comics using pictures + text are not illustrations—they constitute a unique and autonomous art form. The fusion of image + text anticipated the world created by the explosive visual revolution of the later twentieth century. Comics speak directly to that world.

Comics weave pictographic tales on a loom of image + language, playing with time, space, and narrative progression like no other art. Cosmic collisions, casts of thousands, a hyperdramatic teardrop—all can be produced by the comic artist with a few strokes of the pen. The imagined words in the back pages delegated to the comics parallel those in newspaper headlines.

Papers are real.

The strip is art.

Painters see comics from the outside, as a contemporary communications phenomenon. The comic artist, like a museum visitor, basically sees painting from the outside—as a historical and institutional phenomenon. Somewhere in between, in some as yet unexplored dimension, lies the rich vista of "comics-painting."

"The Comic Art Show" journeys into this terra incognita from the world of fine art. The exploration of art from the comic artists' point of view will eventually result in a new generic term to add to those already in existence: sculpture is, film is, photography is, painting is, comics is...

Comics is a twentieth-century art.

—DAVID PASCAL
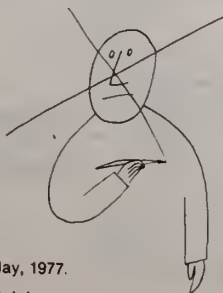
Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape

The first of the undecoded messages read: "Popeye sits in thunder,
Unthought of. From that shoebox of an apartment,
From livid curtain's hue, a tangram emerges: a country."
Meanwhile the Sea Hag was relaxing on a green couch: "How pleasant
To spend one's vacation en la casa de Popeye," she scratched
Her cleft chin's solitary hair. She remembered spinach

And was going to ask Wimpy if he had bought any spinach.
"M'love," he intercepted, "the plains are decked out in thunder
Today, and it shall be as you wish." He scratched
The part of his head under his hat. The apartment
Seemed to grow smaller. "But what if no pleasant
Inspiration plunge us now to the stars? For this is my country."

Suddenly they remembered how it was cheaper in the country.
Wimpy was thoughtfully cutting open a number 2 can of spinach
When the door opened and Swee'pea crept in. "How pleasant!"
But Swee'pea looked morose. A note was pinned to his bib. "Thunder
And tears are unavailing," it read. "Henceforth shall Popeye's apartment
Be but remembered space, toxic or salubrious, whole or scratched."

Olive came hurtling through the window; its geraniums scratched
Her long thigh. "I have news!" she gasped. "Popeye, forced as you know to flee the country
One musty gusty evening, by the schemes of his wizened, duplicate father, jealous of the apartment
And all that it contains, myself and spinach
In particular, heaves bolts of loving thunder
At his own astonished becoming, rupturing the pleasant

Arpeggio of our years. No more shall pleasant
Rays of the sun refresh your sense of growing old, nor the scratched
Tree-trunks and mossy foliage, only immaculate darkness and thunder."
She grabbed Swee'pea. "I'm taking the brat to the country."
"But you can't do that—he hasn't even finished his spinach,"
Urged the Sea Hag, looking fearfully around at the apartment.

But Olive was already out of earshot. Now the apartment
Succumbed to a strange new hush. "Actually it's quite pleasant
Here," thought the Sea Hag. "If this is all we need fear from spinach
Then I don't mind so much. Perhaps we could invite Alice the Goon over"—she scratched
One dug pensively—"but Wimpy is such a country
Bumpkin, always burping like that." Minute at first, the thunder

Soon filled the apartment. It was domestic thunder,
The color of spinach. Popeye chuckled and scratched
His balls: it sure was pleasant to spend a day in the country.

      —John Ashbery
      a sestina from
      The Double Dream of Spring
      (New York: Viking, 1966)

Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Comic Quotation in Contemporary American Painting

by John Carlin
and
Sheena Wagstaff

Andy Warhol.
Popeye, 1961–62.
Casein on canvas.
68¼″ x 58½″.
Collection of
Robert
Rauschenberg.
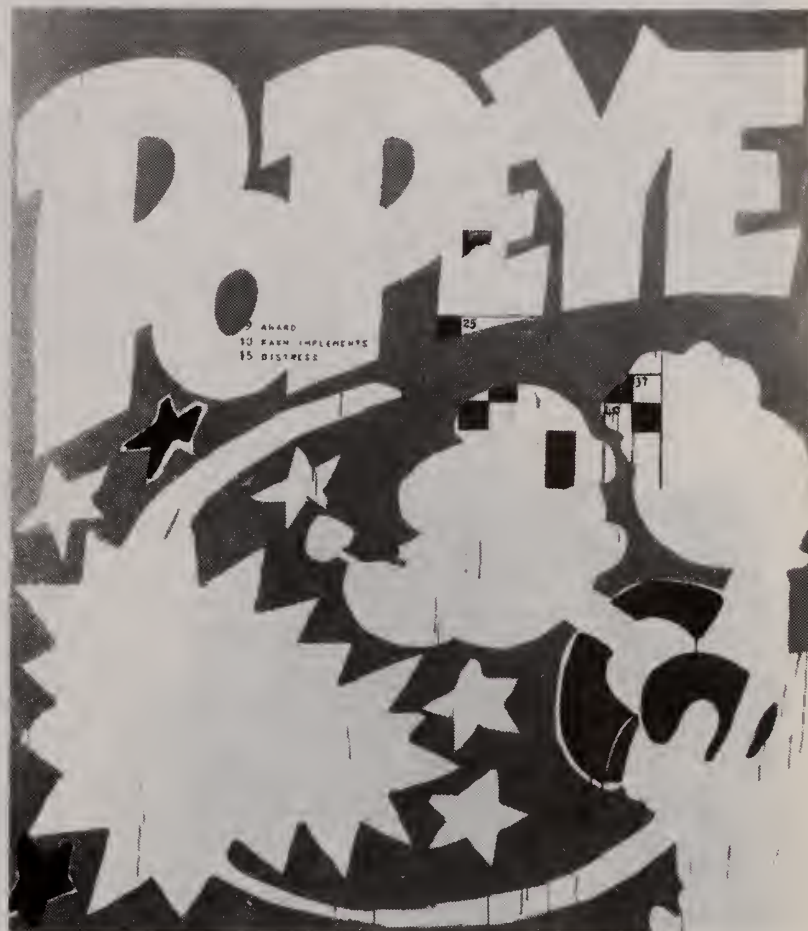
A distinguishing characteristic of post-modern art is the return of recognizable subject matter through the appropriation of existing images and structures. The pervasive quotation of comic strip and cartoon imagery in recent American painting is one of the most interesting instances of appropriation. This use of comic imagery seems completely natural; such images have become an unavoidable part of our cultural landscape. However, the appropriation of an existing means of visual communication is a complex and revealing process which makes apparent the role cultural symbols have in creating, not just reflecting, the conventions of reality in contemporary America.

In a society where "everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation" (Guy DeBord, *The Society of the Spectacle*), reality exists more on the level of the sign than in its referent. The copies of copies that characterize post-modernism reflect the loss of originality and the absence of a sense of a locus of truth in contemporary culture. As Jacques Derrida explains in
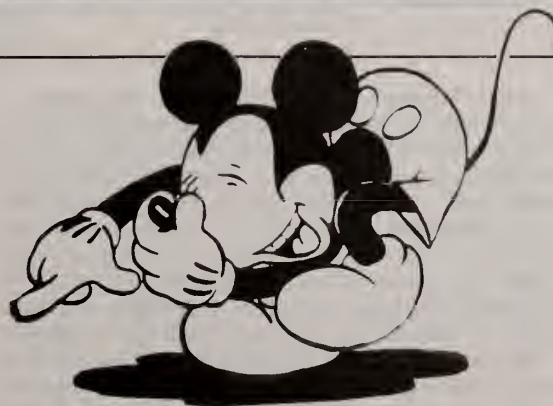
his "Structure, Sign and Play," "in the absence of a center or origin, everything becomes discourse." Because reality has been homogenized on the level of the sign, the exchange of images has become the symbolic structure through which our seemingly entropic social, cultural, and economic existence is unified. The comic image is perfectly suited to this exchange because it is able to per-

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Stuart Davis. *Lucky Strike*, 1924. Oil on paper board, 18 x 24". Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Eduardo Paolozzi. *I was a Rich Man's Plaything*, 1947. Collage, 14 x 9¼". Tate Gallery, London.

Kurt Schwitters. *For Kate*, 1947. Collage, 4 1/8 x 5 1/8". Collection of Kate Steinitz.

Jess. *Tricky Cad Case VII*, 1958. Color comic paste-up covered with clear plastic (6 of 24 panels), 13½ x 25". Odyssia Gallery, New York.

form endlessly without exhaustion. This sense of the image as commodity, when leaked into fine art, undermines the sense of originality upon which the appreciation of traditional art rested. The combination of painting and comics emphasizes the omnipresent role of the sign in our society while simultaneously establishing its critique. Thus, comic quotation in painting does not falsify the original image but reaffirms its strength. In a literal sense there are no originals in comic illustration —the comics' mass appearance represents their only existence; further reproduction strengthens their identity and increases rather than decreases their appeal. When TV outstripped the newspaper in the fifties, "kid culture" comic characters became popular in both media. Because subsequent mass-marketing and merchandising stressed familiarity rather than innovation, most Americans under fifty share the same childhood memories. The post-modern American dream is based on the need for an image that enables the individual to get and survive power.

When I was a boy I was the hero in comic books and movies. I grew up believing in a dream. Now I've lived it out. That's all a man can ask for.

—Elvis

Stuart Davis's use of TAD's cartoon *Outdoor Sports* in his simulated Cubist collage of 1924, *Lucky Strike*, anticipated the now prevalent appropriation of comic images by more than three decades. Ad Reinhardt, known for his severe black-on-black paintings, in the mid-forties made a series of "How to Look" comics intended to educate readers of *P.M.* about the pleasures of modern abstract art. In the late forties, Kurt Schwitters began using comics in Dada-like collages. The Beat artist Jess's *Tricky Cad* series of the late fifties consists of pasted-up rearrangements of *Dick Tracy*, subverting Chester Gould's law-and-order style through its transfiguration into the surreal yet familiar universe of black humor. At roughly the same time, a number of British

Jasper Johns. *Alley Oop*, 1958. Oil on board with newspaper, 23 x 18". Collection of Robert Rauschenberg.

artists began using comics. The seminal figure in the transition from Dada to Pop is Eduardo Paolozzi, whose Bunk series of 1947 deconstructed American pop culture from a Dadaist perspective. Richard Hamilton's Pop manifesto of 1925, *Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, includes a framed cover from the comic book *Young Romance* among its collaged comments on commodity culture. Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg also contributed to the development of the pop sensibility through the use of comic imagery. In major assemblages such as *Charlene* (1954) and *Rebus* (1955), Rauschenberg incorporated comics in a gestural fashion into a network of ordinary debris. Rauschenberg returned to comic imagery in the late seventies with *Tasmanian Devil*, a collage covered by a floating tissue of black moiré. His studio-mate Jasper Johns used comics in a similar fashion in his Bent Blue lithographs of the early seventies. In an earlier painting, *Alley Oop* (1958), however, Johns did something quite different, representing the paneled structure of the strip against a bright orange ground but blurring the figures into abstraction. Johns used the comic strip as he used flags, targets, maps, and numbers; all these themes are pre-existing, two-dimensional images whose existence as signs more than as objects invites speculation about their abstract versus their representational characteristics. Yet in *Alley Oop* the aesthetic distortion occurs within the image, not through gestural scumbling. Johns's prominent brushstroke combined with his use of recognizable imagery places his work directly between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

About 1960, independently of each other, Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein began producing large comic-book paintings. Like Johns, both used comic images to demarcate the reality of the picture plane as a flat, two-dimensional object. This conceptual use of the image evolved from rough painterly appropriations to seemingly perfect copies in which scale, context, and repetition were the inherent means of significance. In his enor-

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Andy Warhol. *Dick Tracy*, 1960. Casein on canvas, 70 1/8 x 52½". Collection of Robert Rauschenberg.
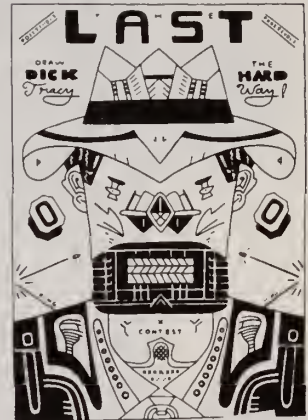
Karl Wirsum. *Dick Tracy*, 1978. Three offset lithographs, 8½ x 11" each. Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York.

mous (Abstract Expressionist scale) canvases, Lichtenstein went so far as to re-create the Ben Day dots used in cheap color-printing. Lichtenstein began making expressionist drawings of the comic characters Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, and Bugs Bunny in 1958. By the turn of the decade he was producing large comic canvases of which *Look Mickey* is an excellent example. He then stopped painting widely recognizable characters, replacing them with images culled primarily from pulp, war, and romance comics. Quotation from anonymous sources allowed Lichtenstein greater freedom to draw on the formal aesthetic style that had attracted him to comics in the first place. The appeal that the comics had for him is demonstrated by his use of the comic style long after he abandoned the use of comic images in the late sixties and seventies.

Andy has fought by repetition to show us that there is no repetition really, that everything we look at is worthy of our attention. That's

been a major direction for the twentieth century, it seems to me.
—John Cage, quoted in Jean Stein, *Edie*, ed. George Plimpton (New York: Knopf, 1982)

Andy Warhol moved from commercial illustrations to fine art through his large comic-strip paintings of 1960–1961, works which predate his later well-known Campbell's soup cans and multiple Marilyns. Paintings such as *Popeye* (1961–62) and *Dick Tracy* (1960) reproduce the comic image, then distort it through exaggeration and painterly gestures.

The two Dick Tracy paintings of 1960 were among the few canvases Warhol hand-painted before turning to silkscreening and painting by proxy. In one there are drips and swashes of paint, in the other cross-hatched crayon lines and misregistered color. Both faithfully trace Tracy onto canvas, then transform the image into art through the enforced neutrality of the artist's gesture.
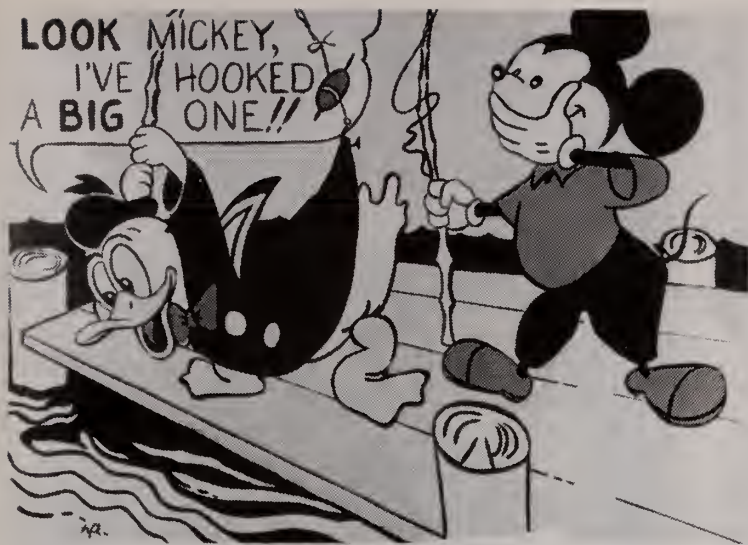
Roy Lichtenstein. *Look Mickey*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 48 x 60″. Collection of the artist.
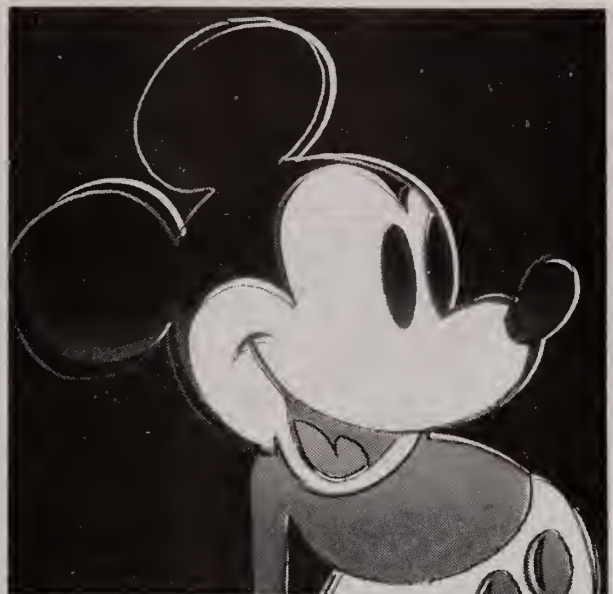
Andy Warhol. *Myths: Mickey Mouse*, 1981. Silkscreen, 38 x 38″. Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc., New York.
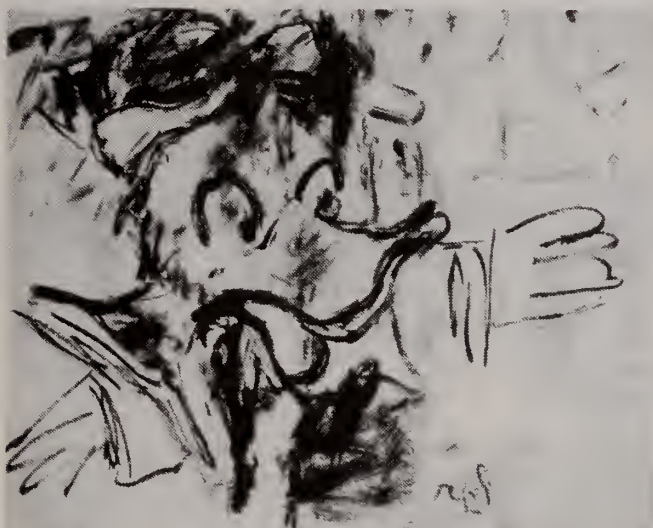
Roy Lichtenstein. *Donald Duck*, 1958. India ink on paper, 20 x 26. Collection of the artist.

Roy Lichtenstein. *Bugs Bunny*, 1958. India ink on paper, 20 x 26″. Collection of the artist.

Instead of projecting an obvious point of view, Warhol produced work which became the locus through which meaning was exchanged. He did so by making work so minimal that it appeared to negate the artist's self, translating the work directly into the mythographic realm of culture; as he said, "If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it." Warhol manipulated this blank superficiality (through the medium of the press as much as through paint) into the strongest conceptual gesture of the late twentieth century. His fascination with pure surface on a cultural as well as a painterly level produced what became the perfect iconography of post-industrial America. In the information age the image (from comic book to Coke bottle) becomes the agent through which the individual is fixed as a subject for ideological representation. Although Warhol's work appears

Peter Saul. *De Kooning Double Ducks*, 1979. Acrylic on canvas, 56 x 78¾″. Frumkin Gallery, New York.
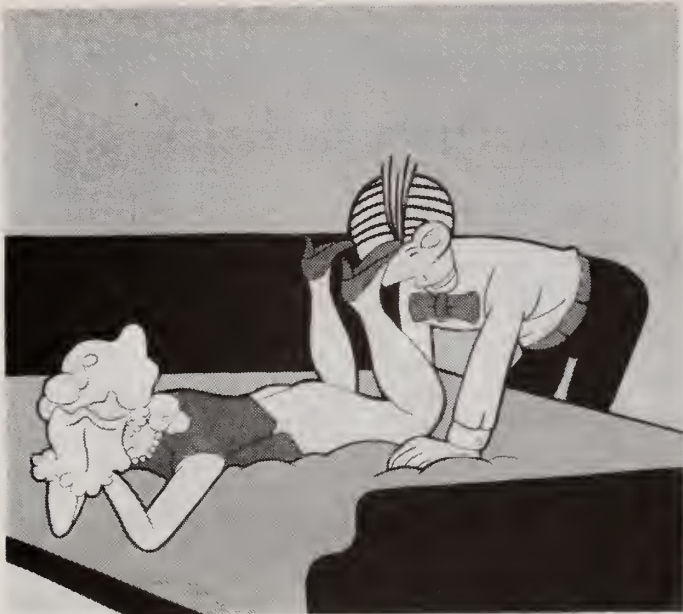
John Wesley. *Bumstead*, 1973. Gouache, 24 x 22". Private collection.

Roy Lichtenstein. *Sweet Dreams, Baby*, 1964. Acrylic on canvas, 37¾ x 28". Collection Ludwig Neue Galerie, Aachen.

Richard Pettibone. *Flash*, 1962-63. Assemblage in box, 9 x 11½".

Chic Young. *Blondie*.

to celebrate rather than provide a critique of commodity culture, his rather obvious equation of pictures and dollars and appropriation of Duchampian irony make paintings like *Popeye* and *Dick Tracy* transform the comic image into an endlessly suggestive context rather than a fixed ideological code. In representing repression, Warhol discovered a fleeting moment of freedom. Perhaps the closest he came to making a statement in his art was to suggest that in a society where everything lies on the surface, one must play along.

Warhol and Lichtenstein utilized comic quotation in a dramatically different way from that of earlier artists. For the most part, Schwitters, Jess, and Rauschenberg used comics as part of a collaged entity that was more of a comment on the incorporation of everyday life into art than on the nature of comics themselves. By using a single image that covered an entire canvas, Warhol and Lichtenstein elevated it into an icon whose appropriation constituted both a comment and a transfiguration. In other words, Pop Art began a meditation on the nature of representation rather than on the representation of nature itself.

The use of comic imagery in Pop Art was not limited to New York artists. On the West Coast, as early as 1959, Ed Ruscha produced the collage *Dublin*, which combined wood, comic strips (prominently *Little Orphan Annie*), and ink. Mel Ramos painted a Batman ring (1962); in 1963 Richard Pettibone collaged Flash Gordon into one of a series of Cornell-like boxes; Bruce Conner, master of the found-footage film, made Mickey Mouse dance atop a mushroom cloud in his *Cosmic Ray* (1961); and throughout his career John Wesley has recreated the character of Bumstead as a humorous but ironic glance at the psychology of repression in the comics. Two other artists associated with Pop are Claes Oldenburg and Öyvind Fahlström, both of whose work is associated with a major comic character. Oldenburg's geometric mouse cleverly plays on the relationship between Mickey Mouse's ears and the film canisters atop the early movie cameras. The geometric perfection of an image which includes both square and circle lent itself to a series of projects, culminating in the architectural fantasy of the Mouse Museum. Fahlström produced a series of Performing Krazy Kat paintings, among them *Performing K.K. III* (1965).

Jim Nutt. *She's Hit*, 1967. Synthetic polymer on plexiglass and enamel on wood, 36½ x 24½". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund 69.101.

Ray Yoshida. *Jimmy Olsen*, 1968. Comic-book collage, 10¼ x 6¾". Collection of the artist.
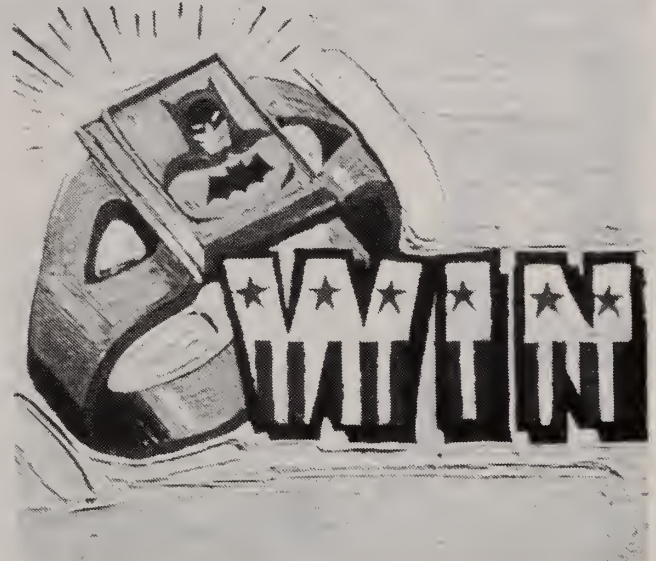
Mel Ramos. *Photo Ring*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 10 x 12". Collection of Louis Meisel.

The strip's zany layout and humor lends itself easily to a visual comment on the power of images alone to sustain a narrative where speech in the balloons is replaced by enlarged details of the strip's surreal landscape. The characters—Krazy, Offisa Pup, and Ignatz—are separate magnetized pieces which can be moved to create an infinite number of stories, thereby subverting the static nature of the comic strip. Like the corollary strip at the bottom of the piece, the word is being shut away—only "jail" is left.

The Chicago artists Ray Yoshida, Roger Brown, Karl Wirsum, and Jim Nutt did not share the Pop artists' propensity for approaching art in a formally deconstructing manner. Their intention was to move away from the reductivist aesthetics of Pop to a more complex and kinetic visual form. Yet they shared the movement's concern with fusing fine art and popular culture so as to reconcile the conflict between private and public discourse. The Hairy Who (launched 1966), which included Nutt and Wirsum, acknowledged elements of pop culture as distinct art forms; through their sympathetic employment of commercial and popular

sources, these artists did not so much appropriate comics as reproduce their directness and playfulness by rearranging them for expressive and anarchic purposes.

Jim Nutt's early style, which often appropriated comic characters, drew upon the work of the raw-youth-culture comic artists (such as R. Crumb) and the more fluid forms of animated cartoons. Wirsum's severe, symmetrically patterned juxtapositions of popular cartoon images with his own created characters seem to be graphically informed as much by the simplified, alternately jagged and fluid, forms of comic strips like *Nancy* and *Dick Tracy* as by folk art.

The Hairy Who produced a series of comic-book catalogues which utilized the cartoon image as the best means of expressing the intensity of their own sentiments about their time. The comic-book genre allowed them to use narrative juxtaposition and expansive humor to combine formal expressive concerns with maximum visceral impact. The catalogues run the gamut of comicry, from adolescent visual and verbal punning to black humor, and echo the underground comics in their often

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Vernon Fisher. *Holy Ghost*, 1980. Acrylic on paper, 26¾ x 28″. Delahunty Gallery, New York.
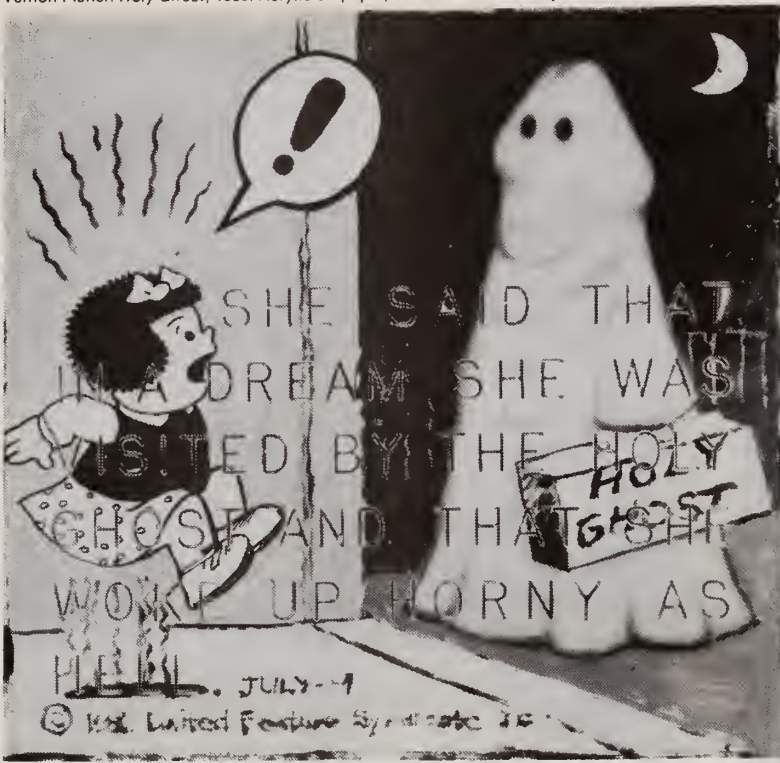
Karl Wirsum.
This Is Only a
Slugged Question, 1961.
Acrylic on paper,
35½ x 28 3/8″.
Phyllis Kind Gallery,
Chicago.
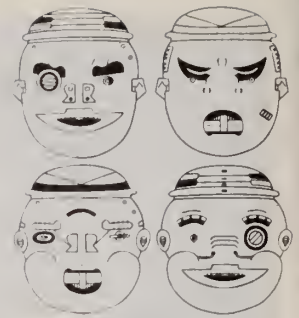
Karl Wirsum
Odd Nancy Out, 1981.
Acrylic on paper,
20 7/8 x 20½ ″.
Phyllis Kind Gallery,
Chicago.

Joe Brainard. *Nancy*, 1972. Pencil on paper, 14 x 10½ ″.

Steve Gianakos. *Lovers and Other Strangers: Lulu and Jesus*, 1981. Acrylic on canvas, 20 x 24″. Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York.

© 1941 United Feature Syndicate.

Ernie Bushmiller.
Nancy, 3/9/41, daily.

oblique but fiercely satiric comments reflecting the national disaffection of the late sixties that was manifested through the "war at home." (At the same time, painters and poets associated with the New York School, including Joe Brainard, John Ashbery, and Frank O'Hara, produced the "C" comics.)

Roger Brown, of the False Image group (founded in 1968), turns the disillusionment of the Hairy Who group into a gently ironic nostalgia. Brown developed a very simplified style of characterization, reminiscent of the silhouetted figures in *Terry and the Pirates* which so often denoted dramatic situations. His work projects theatrical space; his stylish interiors and street scenes conceal an eerie pessimism about the isolation and standardization of the individual.

Brown's work is strongly influenced by his teacher Ray Yoshida, who encouraged Brown and his peers to examine more closely how the comic strip's formal arrangement works to enhance its visual impact. As Jess did with *Tricky Cad V*,

Yoshida in his paintings rearranges the images into a collaged sequence which retains the narrative while simultaneously undermining it.

By the early eighties there was a resurgence of comic quotation. Notable examples of this trend are found in the work of Alexis Smith, Vernon Fisher, Steve Gianakos, David Salle, and Suzañ Pitt. Both Smith and Fisher use *Nancy* in disjunctive narrative sequences that manipulate the components of the comics (both image and text) as separate entities. Through the dialectic thus set up, the works simultaneously negate and constitute themselves in the act of quotation. Gianakos's *Lovers and Other Strangers* (1981) juxtaposes banal comic characters with figures from world history—Dagwood and Hitler, Lulu and Jesus—to expose the tasteless iconography of mass culture. Icons of wildly different orders are leveled yet simultaneously differentiated by his distinctive graphic style, turning the iconographer into iconoclast. In Salle's untitled drawing of 1981, a schematic drawing of Bugs Bunny overlays an ex-

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Suzan Pitt. *Untitled*, 1983. Alkyd on wood, 37 x 34 x 16",
Delahunty Gallery, New York.

The Hairy Who. *Hairy Who Cat-o-log*, 1969. Booklet. Collection of Phyllis Kind.

David Salle. *Untitled*, 1981. Acrylic on paper, 66½ x 47". Collection of Raymond Learsy.

pressionistic nude female torso. His obvious manipulation of images "reveals consumerism both high and low as pornography" (Carter Ratcliff). Through his creation of spectacles which present a large-scale panoply of signs derived from both the art and the commercial world, Salle purposefully confers a voyeuristic status on the spectator. In addition to reducing the art market to a peepshow, Salle plays an ultimately self-destructive game, where the integrity of his work is constantly threatened by its content.

Suzan Pitt (formerly known as an animator) has recently taken comic quotation into sculpture, a rarely used medium for the image. Comic characters, whether appropriated from the two-dimensional strip or from the mobile linearity of the animated cartoon, do not easily lend themselves to a three-dimensional medium. The falling figure of her sculpture *Untitled* (1983), in which both sides of a flat surface are visible, is a composite of jostling painted characters. The time taken by the spectator to perceive all the images exemplifies Pitt's

concern with conveying "the qualities of change and animation in form and existence; the only thing you can trust is change." Pitt interprets the characters as synonymous with those elements of change, to the extent that they become "personal devils." In reflecting human ability to cope with modern life, they look "as though they were caught in an instant between past and future."

> It is symbol against symbol. Gothic Futurism
> is past and maybe future. We are in a period
> of time when we can correct those mistakes
> so that it does not return to Gothic. If it does,
> we will not go to space.
> —Rammellzee, *Ionic Treatise*, 1979

Subway graffiti projects words and pictures/words as pictures which become break-action cartoons as the cars roll through the city. The story has no beginning or end. As the frame-cars get switched around in endless circulation, each moves its message to fit a different plot. Graffiti culture is
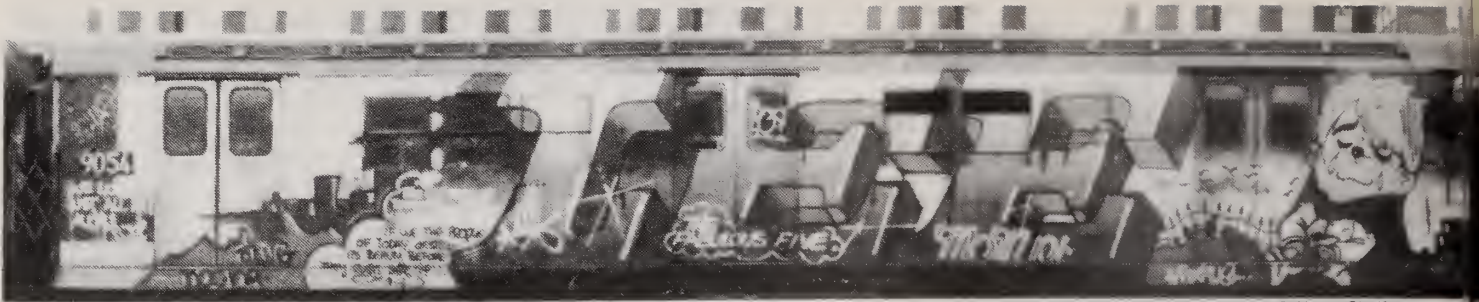
Lee. Painted subway car, 1979. Photograph: collection of Henry Chalfant.

Lee and Fab 5 Fred. Painted mural, 1982.
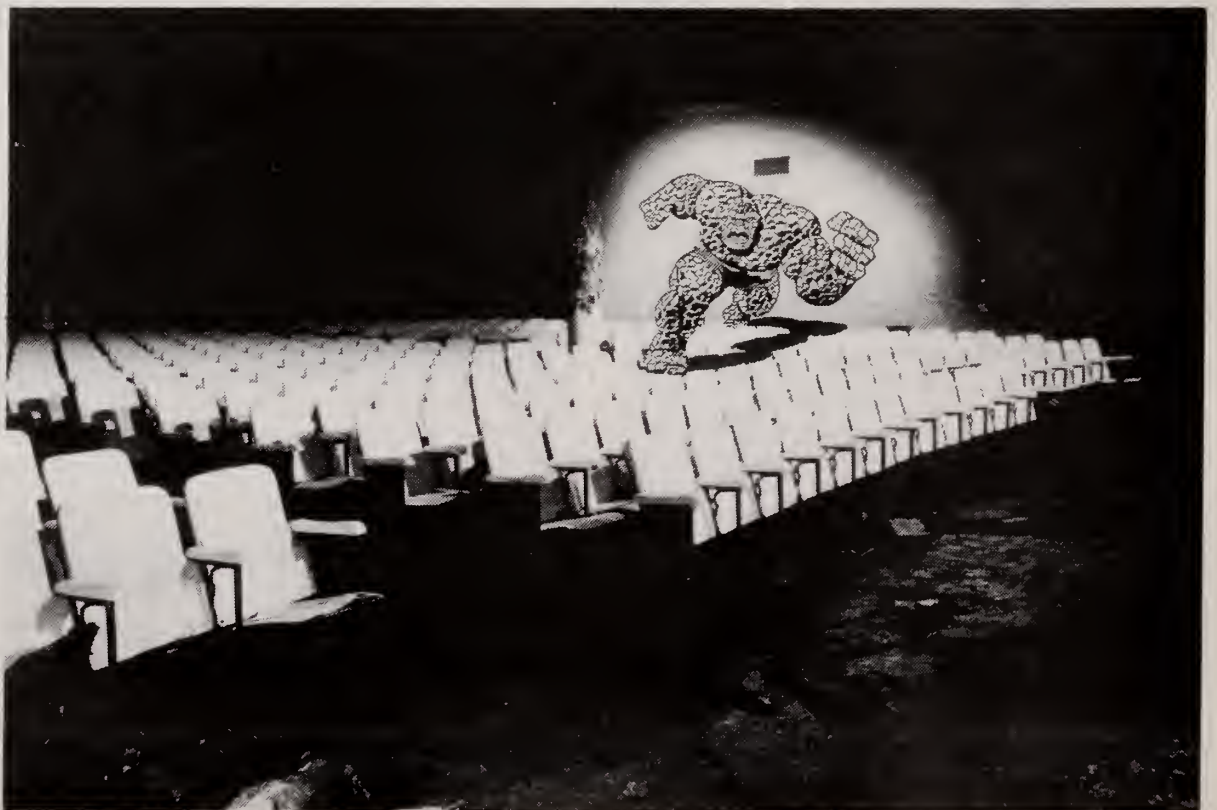
Justen Ladda. The Thing, installation in Bronx schoolroom, 1981.
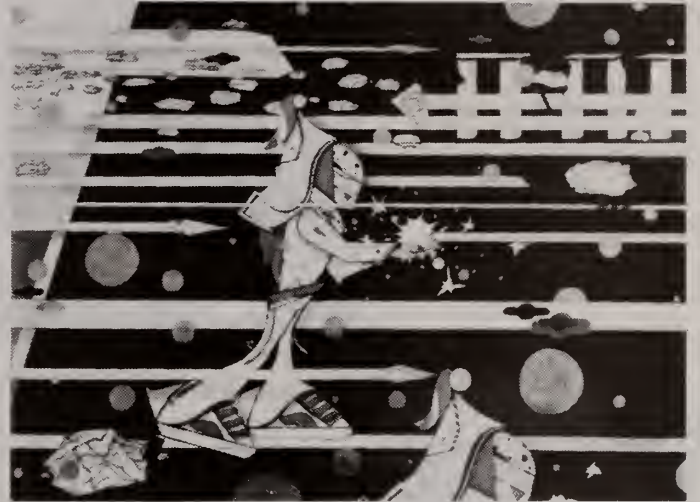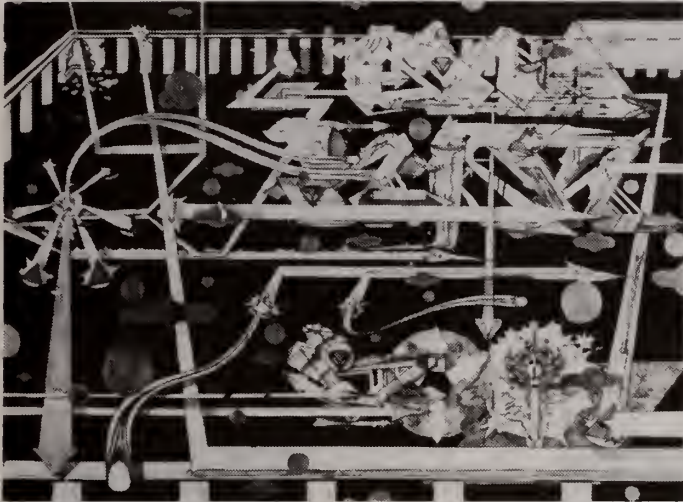
Rammellzee. Frames of *Second Dimension Hell*, 1982. Oil on board, two panels of painting in progress, each 14 x 16".
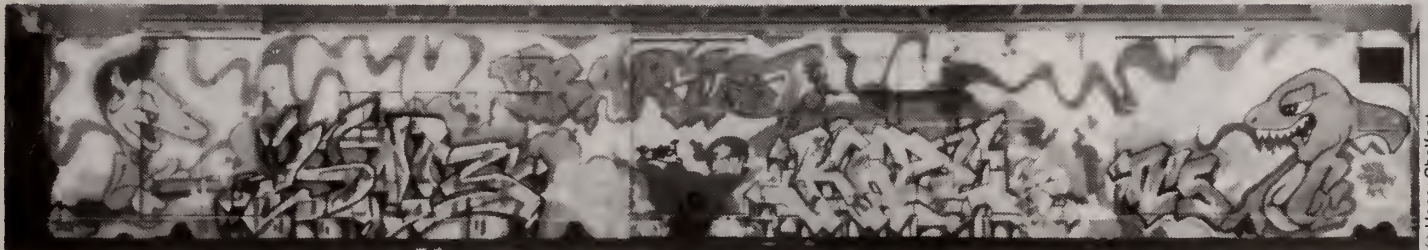
© Henry Chalfant

Sab and Kaze. Painted subway car, 1982. Photograph: collection of Henry Chalfant.

Seen and P. Jay. Painted subway car, 1980. Photograph: collection of Henry Chalfant.

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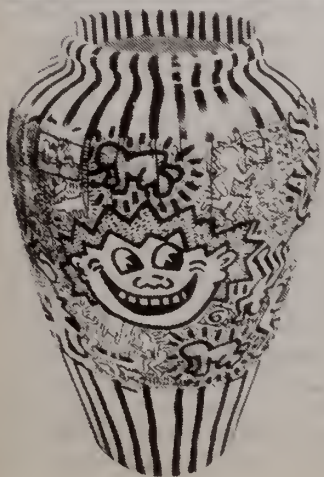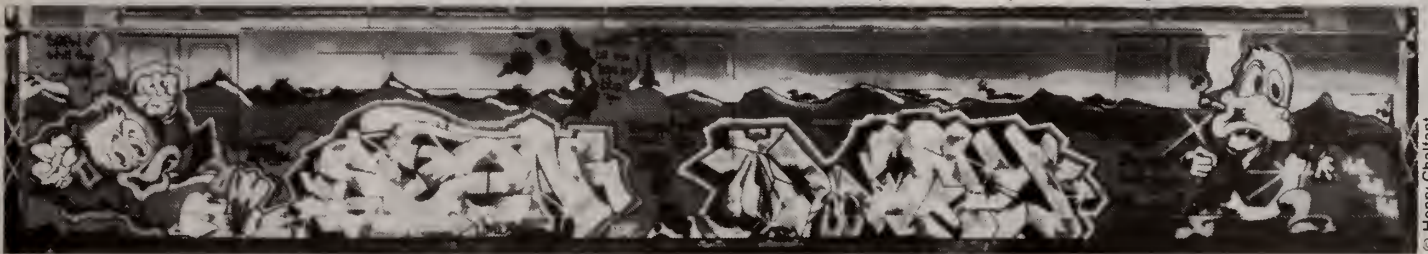
Keith Haring.
Painted vase, October 1981.
Marker ink and
enamel on fiberglass,
40 x 28" diameter.
Collection of
Suzanne Feldman.

Keith Haring.
Painted vase, September 1981.
Marker ink on fiberglass.
40 x 28" diameter.
The Lannan Foundation,
Palm Beach.

Keith Haring.
Painted vase.
August 1981.
Marker ink and
enamel on fiberglass.
40 x 28" diameter.
Collection of
Brooke Alexander.

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Anonymous.
(American Hopi Indian.)
Mickey Mouse doll, c. 1950.
Painted wood. 12 x 5¾ x 4 5/8".
Private collection.

Ronnie Cutrone. *The Dead Christ in Space*, 1983. Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 144". Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

Ronnie Cutrone. *White Woody*,
1962. Acrylic on American flag.
120 x 72". Collection Fredrik Roos.

Ronnie Cutrone. *France Is Very, Very, Very Chic and Talented*, 1982. Acrylic on French flag, 60 x 96".
Collection Carol Lorie.
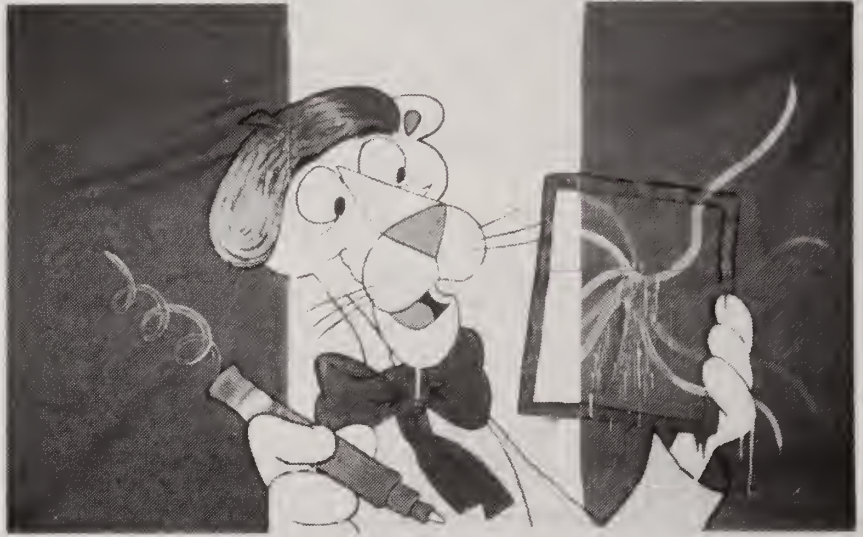
there for the taking; its graphics, signifying characters within continually shifting frames of reference, provide an analogy for reviving life's fullness according to a continuous rhythm, but within the groove of an ever-changing pulse.

Since the mid-seventies, the graffiti style has been the beat to which the mobilized underground forces move to combat the (transit) authority. Marking conquered territory, graffiti tags name the artists as heroes. In addition to the word (Sab and Kaze), graffiti artists appropriate existing characters such as Howard the Duck (P. Jay and Seen), Dick Tracy, Cheech, the Smurfs, etc., as well as invent their own (Lee). Dondi animated the letters, made them dance: colors breaking down the form, tags tumbling into wild style. Rammellzee saw wild style turn from a conglomeration of "bubbleism," Gothic text, and commercial calligraphy into nymphism: letters as small-winged structures, a morphogenetic state gestating in the darkness of the subway to emerge as Gothic Futurism in the

light of post-train painting. Though his word still holds sway with many train painters, in *Frames of Second Dimension Hell* (1982), Rammellzee's war goes beyond train-yard battlefields. He wants to see the letter returned to its original structural function (i.e., why *r* or *a* was shaped thus). The "arming" of a pure letter with arrows or star-launcher bars prevents it from accruing the meanings which adhere to it by its inclusion in discourse. The letter becomes a pictographic symbol with its own structural truth.

"A new mythology is possible in the Space Age, where we will again have heroes and villains, as regards intentions towards this planet." William Burroughs goes on to say that the future lies in space, not time; this state of mind, characterizing the eighties, beams in on a Beat sensibility—acknowledging the spirit of a culture intimately entwined with the rhythm of the beat and a dynamic compulsion to convey the Message. The rear-guard action resurrects itself as a platoon
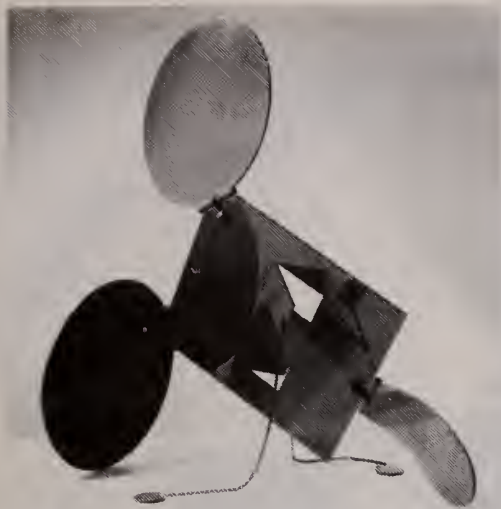
Claes Oldenburg. *Geometric Mouse—B*, 1971. Steel, 38 11/16 x 36 x 22". Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.
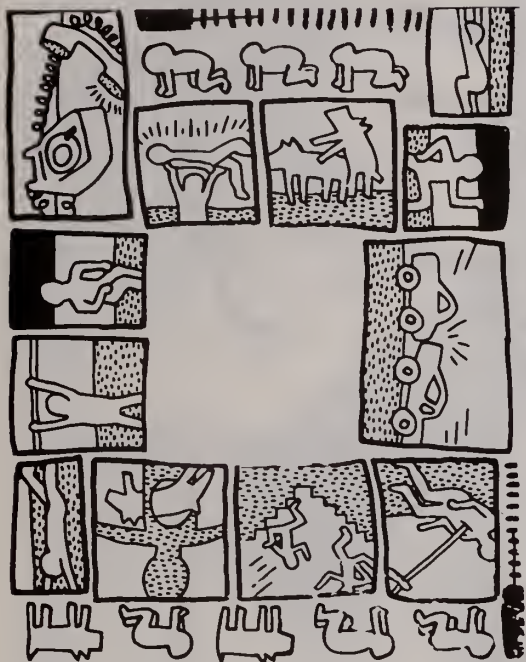
Keith Haring. *Untitled*, April 25, 1982. Marker, ink, and paint on found canvas, 97 x 92⅓". Collection of Suzanne and Howard Feldman.

Keith Haring. *Untitled*, 1981. Sumi ink on vellum, 42 x 55". Private collection.

whose emissaries include Felix, Fred Flintstone, Elroy, Mickey Mouse, Woody Woodpecker—and they speak of a future which is now.

In his recent flag paintings, Ronnie Cutrone, who has worked with Warhol since the mid-sixties, has veered away from the latter's take on comic imagery. Cutrone's cartoon characters are TV personalities who have become assimilated as icons, as emblems of pop culture, and also, through placement on the "national symbol as environment," as personifications of national character. Cutrone goes beyond Warhol's use of ironic conceptualism; the significance of the incorporation of popular motifs into art is no longer an issue. Cartoons have been assimilated as icons not only because of their recognizability but also because their allegoric projection on the flag constitutes an unequivocal and powerful moral statement. Cutrone's art, both formally and conceptually, often derives its tension from the struggle between good and evil: in this case the wrongdoer is the state and the hero the hapless comic character.

Keith Haring's pictographs do not make Cutrone's moral distinctions, yet he is no less concerned with the bastions of power in today's state. Haring combines comic images such as the Smurfs and Mickey Mouse with his own characters, the Atomic Baby and Dogman. They become interchangeable symbols, denoting potent energy in physical, political, inspirational, or sexual form. His work is close to that of the comic strip. He has learned that the repetition of symbols within narrative episodes induces a familiarity with what then becomes a glyphic vocabulary; this recognition makes it easier for the force of the message to get through. The core of Haring's allegories is that the powers that be (state, media, dollar) dictate people's lives, and that the energy represented by these powerful, swaying forces (often bestowed cosmically from a flying saucer) must be transformed by the individual in order to survive. The independent possession/recharging of energy, and thus the ability to move autonomously, becomes the absolute goal, the human means of survival. Although there are no obvious heroes (or

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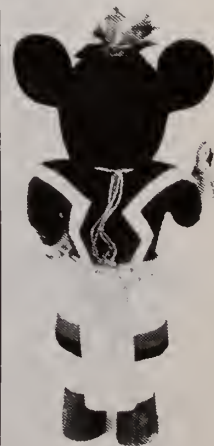
Kenny Scharf. *Felix on a Pedestal*, 1982. Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 96 x 104″. Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York.

villains) in Haring's work, Mickey Mouse becomes mighty through the wielding of his own power baton; he has successfully won the battle against the invisible foe—the Enervator. Meanwhile, Haring and his sometime partner L.A.2 zip around the city like a hyperactive Batman and Robin, filling in the spaces.

Kenny Scharf seems less optimistic about the present. His groove is a steady unvarying beat maintaining the tempo of life for his chosen people —the Flintstones and the Jetsons. Although their cartoon contexts place them, respectively, in the Stone Age and the techno-future, the characters themselves, as vignettes of early sixties American family life, have not varied from their inception. It is not just nostalgia that motivates Scharf to immortalize the first cartoon "sit-coms." A profound disillusionment with the present forces him to sift back through the innocent memories of his child-

hood in order to perpetuate a theme which, when projected out of its prefab time warp into the space age of painting, becomes a myth of the ideal nuclear family.

Scharf's fantastic post-apocalyptic allegories have moved beyond a resigned attitude toward nuclear annihiliation into a realm where the potent significance of the characters is at once entertaining and horrifying—Astro flees in terror as space vibrates with Felix's resounding maniacal laugh. He presents the future rather than predicts it.

There is no play among the ruins. Yet through the image of reality generated by the cosmic-comic, the transcendent shape-shift occurs...in the funhouse, destructive concepts beget pleasurable images. Comic laughter and the signs of disaster spin the message through the retro rhythm of the future to the pulsing beat of the now.

John Wesley, *Bumstead in a Strait Jacket*, 1975. Acrylic on paper, 25¼ x 12½ ". Collection of the artist.

Roy Lichtenstein. *I Can See the Whole Room*, 1961. Oil on canvas, 48 x 48". Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine.

Kenny Scharf.
Oh God Green Rocks, 1982.
Acrylic and spray paint on canvas,
40 x 30". Tony Shafrazi Gallery.

Roy Lichtenstein.
Pistol, 1964.
Felt banner, 82 x 49"
(edition of 20).

Checklist of the Exhibition

George Herriman. *Krazy Kat*, bottom half, Sunday, 1/12/41.

Comics

Media are given only for original art. The Sunday comic strips are in color and on a full page; the daily strips are in black and white. The day of publication is indicated within the entry.

Ernie Bushmiller (b. 1905)
Nancy, July 11, 1946, daily
Ink on paper
Collection of Jerry Robinson

Milton Caniff (b. 1907)
Terry and the Pirates, July 7, 1945, Sunday
Ink on paper
Collection of Bob Stanley

Al Capp (1909-1979)
Li'l Abner, October 30, 1966, Sunday
Ink on paper
Museum of Cartoon Art, Port Chester, N.Y.

R. Crumb (b. 1943)
Car Load o' Comics, back cover, 1976
Watercolor pencils on paper, comic book
Collection of David Toplitz

Arcade No. 4, "That's Life," 1975
Ink on paper, comic book
Collection of David Toplitz

Will Elsner (b. 1917)
The Spirit, n.d.
Comic book
Collection of John Benson

Lyonel Feininger (1871-1956)
Wee Willie Winkie's World, September 23, 1906, Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Collection of Richard Marschall

H.C. Fisher (1885-1954)
Mutt and Jeff, November 25, 1928, Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Collection of Richard Marschall

Rube Goldberg (1883-1970)
Foolish Invention: "How to keep you from forgetting to mail your wife's letter," c. 1932, daily
Ink on paper
Collection of Irma Goldberg

Chester Gould (b. 1900)
Dick Tracy, August 4, 1957, Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Museum of Cartoon Art, Port Chester, N.Y.

Harold Gray (1894-1968)
Little Orphan Annie, July 7, 1944, daily
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
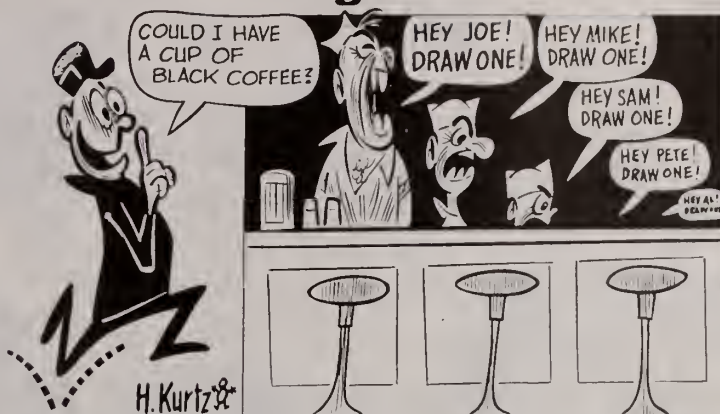Collection of Richard Marschall

Bill Griffith (b. 1944)
Zip Code, 1979
Pen, brush and ink on paper, comic book
Collection of the artist

Bill Everett. Panels from *Sub-Mariner*.

Milt Gross (1895-1953)
Dave's Delicatessen, June 10, 1928, Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Museum of Cartoon Art, Port Chester, N.Y.

George Herriman (1880-1944)
Krazy Kat, June 11, 1936, Sunday
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art

Krazy Kat, n.d., Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Graham Gallery, New York

The Family Upstairs, June 24, 1911, daily
Collection of Richard Marschall

Bill Holman (b. 1903)
Smokey Stover, 1944, Sunday
Collection of Richard Marschall

Robert Kane (b. 1916) and Jerry Robinson
(b. 1922)
Batman and the Joker, front cover, 1942
Ink and wash on paper, comic book
Collection of Jerry Robinson

Walt Kelly (1913-1973)
Pogo, February 16, 1968, daily
Pen and ink on paper
Collection of Selby Kelly

Frank King (1883-1969)
Gasoline Alley, October 31, 1925, daily
Ink on paper
Collection of Richard Marschall

Gasoline Alley, 1930, Sunday
Collection of Richard Marschall

Gasoline Alley, 1931, Sunday
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art

Harvey Kurtzman (b. 1924)
Mad No. 1, cover, November 1952
Comic book
Collection of Anne Griffiths

Frontline Combat No. 5, cover, 1952
Comic book
Collection of Anne Griffiths

Harvey Kurtzman (b. 1924) and Wally
Wood (1927-1981)
Mad No. 12, "3D," 1954
Comic book
Private collection

Stan Lee (b. 1922) and Steve Ditko (b. 1927)
Spider-Man No. 25, "Spider-Man Goes Mad,"
1965
Ink on paper, comic book
Private collection

Stan Lee (b. 1922) and Jack Kirby (b. 1917)
Fantastic Four No. 55, "When Strikes the Silver
Surfer," 1966
Ink on paper, comic book
Private collection

Winsor McCay (1869-1934)
Little Sammy Sneeze, 1905, Sunday
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Collection of Ray Monlz

Little Nemo, 1908, Sunday
Collection of Richard Marschall

Dreams of the Rarebit Fiend, February 9, 1913,
Sunday
Collection of Richard Marschall

Richard Outcault, (1863-1928)
The Yellow Kid, April 26, 1896, Sunday
Ink on paper
Collection of Richard Marschall

Gary Panter (b. 1950)
Jimbo, 1981
Ink and wash on paper, comic book
Collection of the artist

Alex Raymond (1909-1956)
Flash Gordon, n.d., daily
San Francisco Academy of Comic Art

E. C. Segar (1894-1938)
Popeye, 1936, daily
Collection of Richard Marschall

Joe Shuster (b. 1914) and Jerry Siegel (b. 1914)
Superman, 1942
Ink on paper, comic book
Collection of Jerry Robinson

Art Spiegelman (b. 1948)
Two-Fisted Painters, "The Matisse Falcon,"
n.d.
Comic book
Collection of the artist

Ace Hole, Midget Detective, 1973-74
Ink and collage on paper, comic book
Collection of the artist

Cliff Sterrett (1883-1964)
Polly and Her Pals, 1927, Sunday
Collection of Richard Marschall

Polly and Her Pals, n.d., Sunday
Ink, crayon and wash on paper
National Cartoonists Society, New York

Garry Trudeau (b. 1948)
Doonesbury, n.d., daily
Ink, crayon, wash on paper
Museum of Cartoon Art, Port Chester, N.Y.

silver linings

Harvey Kurtzman. *Silver Linings*, 5/23/48.

© Harvey Kurtzman

Brad Ricker. *Nancy*, 1979. Comic strip collage, 1½ x 5½". Collection of the artist. © United Feature Syndicate

Ad Reinhardt. *A Page of Jokes*, 1946. Collage of ink and paper, 9¾ x 16¼". Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Ad Reinhardt, 76.50.

Paintings, Sculpture, and Works on Paper

Dimensions are in inches, height preceding width and depth.

Roger Brown (b. 1941)
Untitled, c. 1974
Old iron with paint, 7 x 5 x 5
Collection of Robert Freidus

Ronnie Cutrone (b. 1948)
The Price of Liberty Is Eternal Vigilance, 1982
Acrylic on paper, 22 x 30
Collection of Valerie Johnson

Stuart Davis (1894-1964)
Lucky Strike, 1924
Oil on paperboard, 18 x 24
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Oyvind Fahlström (b. 1928)
Performing K.K. III, 1965
Oil and collage on canvas with four movable parts, 54½ x 36½
Collection of Robert Rauschenberg

John Fawcett (b. 1939)
Show Announcement 1971, 1971
Collage and ink on paper, 20¾ x 28
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Gift of Dr. Marilyn and Ivan C. Karp   76.8

Vernon Fisher (b. 1943)
Holy Ghost, 1980
Acrylic on paper, 26¾ x 28
Delahunty Gallery, New York

Steve Gianakos (b. 1938)
Lovers and Other Strangers, 1981
Acrylic on canvas, three panels: 20 x 24 each; 20 x 72 overall
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Keith Haring (b. 1958)
Untitled, August 11, 1981
Magic marker on paper, 20 x 26
Collection of the artist

Untitled, September 1982
Dayglo enamel on wood, 20½ x 24
Collection of the artist

Jess (b. 1923)
Tricky Cad Case V, 1958
Color comic paste-up covered with clear plastic, 13½ x 25
Odyssia Gallery, New York

The Truth Shall Be Thy Warrant, 1976
Oil on canvas, 46¾ x 58¾
Odyssia Gallery, New York

Jasper Johns (b. 1930)
Alley Oop, 1958
Oil and collage on cardboard, 23½ x 18
Collection of Robert Rauschenberg

Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923)
Bugs Bunny, 1958
India ink on paper, 20 x 26
Collection of the artist

Mickey Mouse, 1958
India ink on paper, 19 x 25
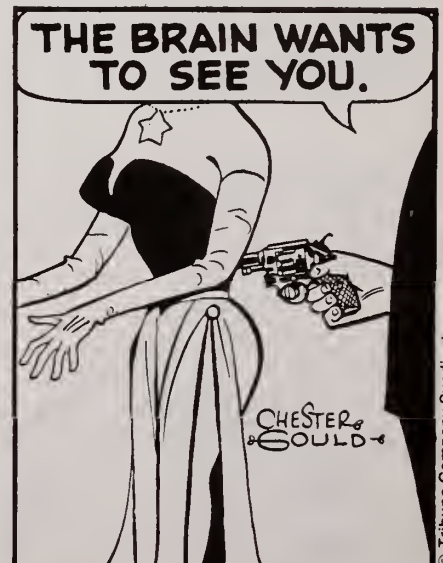Collection of the artist

I Can See the Whole Room, 1961
Oil on canvas, 48 x 48
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine

Jim Nutt (b. 1938)
She's Hit, 1967
Synthetic polymer on plexiglass and enamel on wood, 36½ x 24½
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Larry Aldrich Foundation Fund   69.101

Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929)
Ice Cream Cone Upside Down with Mickey Mouse Head, 1963
Watercolor and crayon on paper, 16¾ x 14
Collection of Holly and Horace Solomon

Suzan Pitt (b. 1943)
Untitled, 1983
Alkyd on wood, 37 x 34 x 16
Delahunty Gallery, New York

Chester Gould. *Dick Tracy*.

THE BRAIN WANTS TO SEE YOU.

CHESTER GOULD

© Tribune Company Syndicate

Lee Quinones (b. 1960)
The Spirit of the IRT, 1976
Marker on paper, 8½ x 28¼
Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York

Mel Ramos (b. 1935)
Photo Ring, 1962
Oil on canvas, 10 x 12
Collection of Louis Meisel

Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925)
Tasmanian Devil, 1975-78
Solvent transfer drawing and fabric collaged to
    paper, 42 x 30 ⅛
Collection of the artist

Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967)
A Page of Jokes, 1946
Collage of ink and paper, 9¾ x 16¼
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York;
    Gift of Mrs. Ad Reinhardt   76.50

David Salle (b. 1952)
Untitled, 1981
Acrylic on paper, 66½ x 47
Collection of Raymond Learsy

Kenny Scharf (b. 1958)
Heaven and Hell, 1981
Acrylic, marker, and spray paint on canvas
    board, two panels: 24 x 20 each;
    24 x 40 overall
Collection of the artist

Alexis Smith (b. 1949)
Déjà Vu, 1974
Mixed media on paper, 12 x 124
Collection of Holly and Horace Solomon

Saul Steinberg (b. 1914)
Bleeker Street, 1969
Graphite, colored pencil, ink and gouache on
    paper, 22 x 28¼ ″
Whitney Museum of American Art, N.Y.
Promised gift of an anonymous donor   P.26.80

Andy Warhol (b. 1930)
Dick Tracy, 1960
Casein on canvas, 48 x 33⅞
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Peter M. Brant

Popeye, 1961-62
Casein on canvas, 68¼ x 58½
Collection of Robert Rauschenberg

John Wesley (b. 1928)
Bumstead in a Strait Jacket, 1975
Acrylic on paper, 25½ x 12½
Collection of the artist

Karl Wirsum (b. 1939)
Dick Tracy, 1978
Three offset lithographs, 8½ x 11 each
Phyllis Kind Gallery, New York

Saul Steinberg. *Bleeker Street*, 1969. Graphite, colored pencil, ink and gouache on paper, 22 x 28¼ ″. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Promised gift of an anonymous donor. P.26.80.

Ray Yoshida (b. 1930)
Comic Book Specimens No. 6, 1969
Comic-book pages on cardboard, 24 x 18¾
Collection of Jim Nutt and Gladys Nilsson

Anonymous (Alaskan Eskimo)
Olive Oyl doll, c. 1940
Carved ivory, 4½ high
Private collection

Anonymous (American Hopi Indian)
Mickey Mouse doll, c. 1950
Painted wood, 12 x 5¾ x 4⅝
Private collection

Additional Works

**John Ashbery, Joe Brainard, Frank O'Hara, Ron
Padgett, and others**
C Comics, No. 1 and No. 2, 1964
Booklet
Collection of J. Kennedy

Henry Chalfant (b. 1940)
Subway car painted by Lee, 1980
Photograph, 10 x 32
Collection of the photographer

Subway car painted by Sab and Kaze, 1980
Photograph, 10 x 32
Collection of the photographer

Subway car painted by Seen and P.J., 1980
Photograph, 10 x 32
Collection of the photographer

The Hairy Who
Hairy Who comic catalogues

Portable Hairy Who, 1966
Booklet
Collection of Phyllis Kind

Hairy Who, 1968
Booklet
Collection of Phyllis Kind

Hairy Who Side Show, 1968
Booklet
Collection of Phyllis Kind

Hairy Who Cat-a-log, 1969
Booklet
Collection of Phyllis Kind

Rube Goldberg. *Foolish Contraptions*, "How to Empty an Ashtray."

PROFESSOR BUTTS TRIPS OVER A HAZARD ON A MINIATURE GOLF COURSE AND LANDS ON AN IDEA FOR AN AUTOMATIC DEVICE FOR EMPTYING ASH TRAYS.
BRIGHT FULL MOON (A) CAUSES LOVE BIRDS (B) TO BECOME ROMANTIC AND AS THEY GET TOGETHER THEIR WEIGHT CAUSES PERCH (C) TO TIP AND PULL STRING (D) WHICH UPSETS CAN (E) AND SPRINKLES WOOLEN SHIRT (F) CAUSING IT TO SHRINK AND DRAW ASIDE CURTAIN EXPOSING PORTRAIT OF WIGWAG PUP'S MASTER (G). AS PUP (H) SEES MASTER'S PICTURE HE WIGWAGS TAIL FOR JOY AND UPSETS ASH TRAY (I), SPILLING ASHES AND SMOULDERING BUTTS INTO ASBESTOS BAG (J) ATTACHED TO SKY ROCKET (K). BUTT (L), PASSING FUSE (M), IGNITES IT AND CAUSES ROCKET TO SHOOT OUT OF WINDOW DISPOSING OF ASHES.
YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE TWENTY OR THIRTY HIGH-POWERED AEROPLANES READY TO GO OUT AND SEARCH FOR THE ASBESTOS BAG.
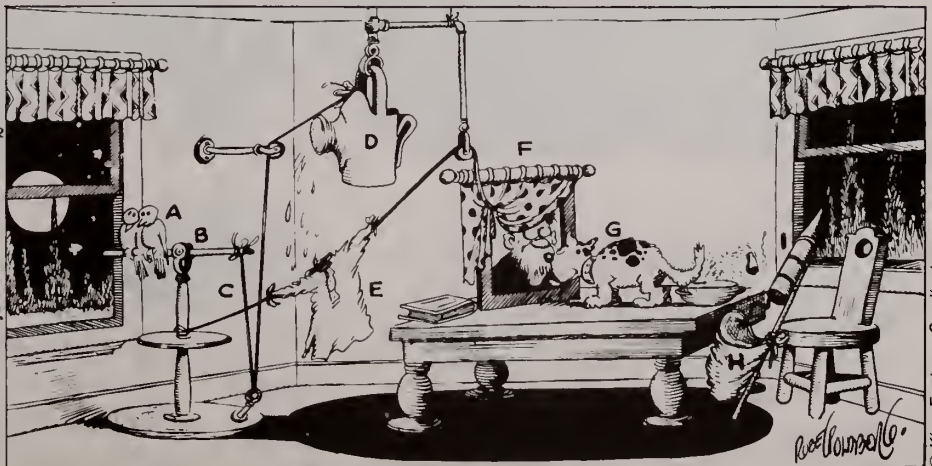
Cliff Sterrett. *Polly and Her Pals*, 1/30/27, bottom two tiers.

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We would like to extend sincere thanks to those who have generously lent works for the exhibition, and to the following individuals for their cooperation and consideration during the preparation of the show and this publication:

Karen Amiel [Delahunty Gallery]; John Ashbery; Robert Becker [*Interview* magazine]; John Benson; Carol Celantano [Phyllis Kind Gallery]; Henry Chalfant; Ronnie Cutrone; Edit de Ak; William Gaines; Pamela Gettinger [Robert Elkon Gallery]; Steve Gianakos; Keith Haring; Shirley Irons [Barbara Gladstone Gallery]; Carrol Janis [Sidney Janis Gallery]; Shaw Kaake and the Alfred University Video Space; Carol Kalish [Marvel Comics]; Cheryl Kaufman [Phyllis Kind Gallery]; Phyllis Kind; Justen Ladda; Roy Lichtenstein; Olivia Match; Martin Moskof; David Pascal; Anne Plumb [Tony Shafrazi Gallery]; Rammellzee; Robert Rauschenberg; Georgia Riley [Graham Gallery]; Kenny Scharf; Allan Schwarzman [Barbara Gladstone Gallery]; Tony Shafrazi; Alexandra Sutherland [Tony Shafrazi Gallery]; Raul Villa; John Wesley; David White; Ray Yoshida.

At the Whitney Museum, we would like to express appreciation to Doris Palca for her interest in and support of the project, and we would like to particularly thank Richard Armstrong, Janet Heit, Lisa Phillips, Rebecca Saunders, Phillip Walsh, and Karl Willers for their valuable assistance.

The Comic Art Show would not have been possible without the assistance of Richard Marschall, Jerry Robinson, Art Spiegelman, Brian Walker and Chuck Green of the Museum of Comic Art, and J. Hoberman. We are especially grateful to Fantagraphics Books—Peppy White, Kim Thompson, Tom Mason, Gary Groth, Plato, and Oliver—for their dedication and expertise in producing this catalogue. We would also like to thank Pat Gilchrest for her invaluable work in editing the publication. In addition, special thanks to Keith Haring for designing a T-shirt to commemorate the exhibition. Finally, our gratitude to the comics syndicates for allowing us to reproduce material under their copyright, and in particular to King Features Syndicate for printing a poster in conjunction with the exhibition.

The Comic Art Show includes a program of classic animation shown hourly Monday through Friday from 11:30 - 2:30.

Monday - Early silent cartoons including Little Nemo, Gertie, Mutt and Jeff, Farmer Al Falfa, Bobby Bumps, Koko the Clown, Felix the Cat, and Krazy Kat.

Tuesday - Classic Disney shorts including *Steamboat Willie*, *Skeleton Dance*, *Three Little Pigs*, and *Through the Mirror*.

Wednesday - work by the Fleischer brothers including Koko, Betty Boop, Popeye, and Superman.

Thursday - Warner Bros. and MGM cartoons featuring the work of Tex Avery and Chuck Jones; titles include *A Wild Hare, Swooner Crooner, Bad Luck Blackie, Duck Amuck, Duck Dodgers in the 24½ Century,* and many others.

Friday - contemporary independent animation featuring the work of Sally Cruikshank, Susan Pitt, George Griffin, and others.

(*NOTE:* - Program subject to change, a complete listing available at the exhibition.)

The animation program was compiled by John Carlin.

The following individuals and organizations were invaluable in facilitating the compilation: Donald Crafton (early animation), Chuck Jepsen - Ball and Chain Studios (Fleischer) Mary Dill (Walt Disney Productions), Elizabeth Sykes and Hal Geer (Warner Bros.), Stuart Snyder (MGM/UA), Joshua Brand (Hanna-Barbera), John Canemaker, and George Griffin.
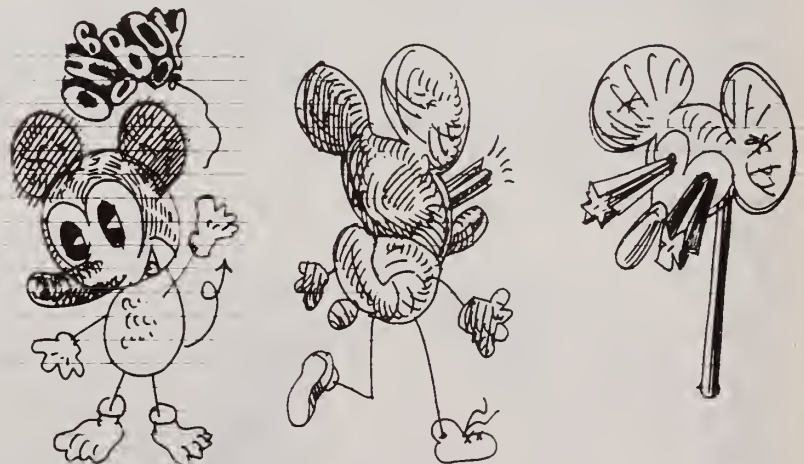
Claes Oldenburg. *Metamorphic Studies of Cartoon Mice*, "OH BO BOOY." 1968. Ball point pen on spiral notebook pages. Each 5 x 2¾".
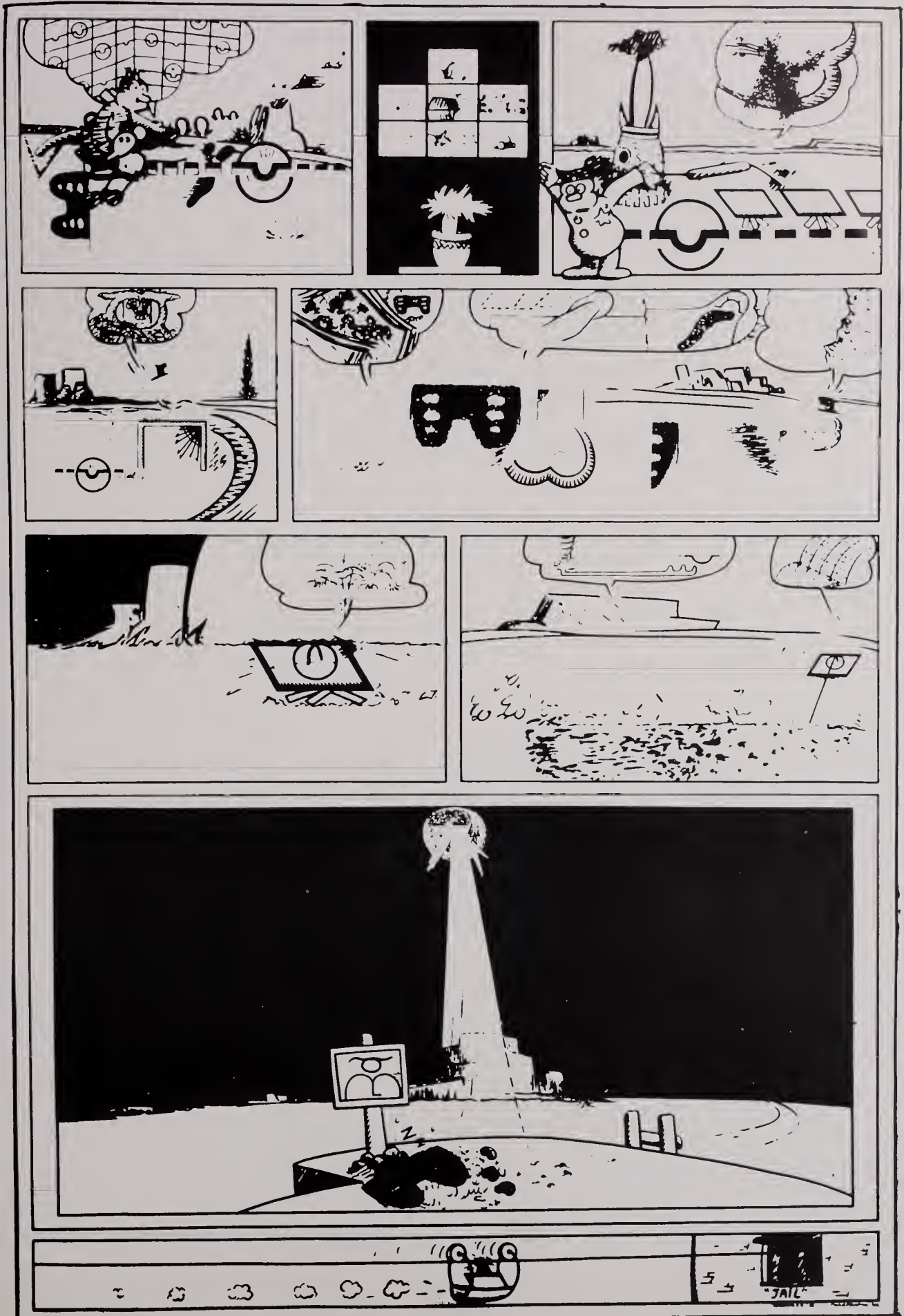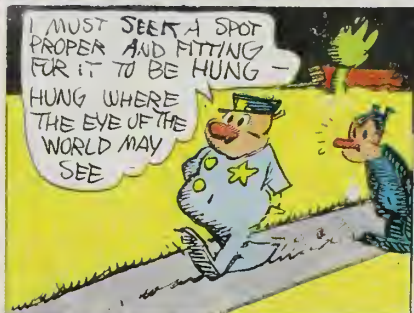
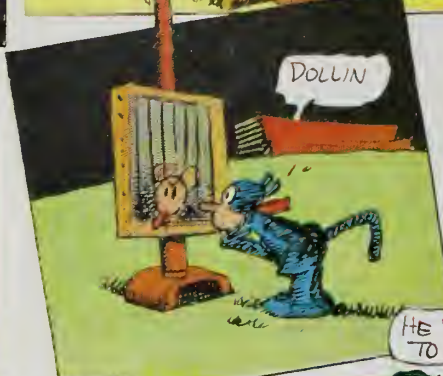Öyvind Fahlström. *Performing K.K. III*, 1965. Oil and collage on canvas with four movable parts, 54½ x 36½ ". Collection of Robert Rauschenberg.